

Conference of modern Churchmen

# Christ for Us Today

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Papers read at the Conference of Modern Churchmen,  
Somerville College, Oxford, July 1967

with

an appended essay by Edward Carpenter,  
President of the Modern Churchmen's Union

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edited by Norman Pittenger

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## CHRIST FOR US TODAY

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## PREFACE

THE CHAPTERS of this book comprise the opening sermon and the lectures delivered at the fiftieth annual conference of the Modern Churchmen's Union, held at Somerville College, Oxford, from 24th to 28th July 1967. With between two hundred and fifty and three hundred persons in attendance, this conference was one of the most interesting in the long series which the Union has sponsored. Some of the papers received attention in the national press, although in context it should be said that they were by no means as 'sensational' as some newspaper comments implied. In any event, it is a principle of the Modern Churchmen's Union that freedom of expression shall be granted to all who are invited to speak, and it was interesting to observe that even when there was marked dissent from this or that particular idea expressed by a speaker the conference as a whole welcomed the opportunity to give serious consideration to views with which many present may not have been in agreement.

The title of this book is *Christ for Us Today*. It recalls a phrase from Dietrich Bonhoeffer and expresses precisely what the planning committee had in view when it arranged the programme for 'Somerville 1967', as the Archbishop described our gathering in his opening sermon. The first five lectures were concerned to give a foundation, in world religion and in biblical study, for the last five, whose specific interest was in 'Jesus' Significance Today'. Some have wondered why no place was allowed for philosophical prolegomena. The answer is twofold: first, it is impossible to do *everything* in a brief four days' session. Second, the planning committee felt that the philosophical issues were so enormous that not one but several conferences would be required if they were to be given the attention they merit. Furthermore, some have asked, why did we not have a paper dealing with the christology of the 'death of God theologians'? Once again, the same answer may be returned. But it is perhaps worthy of note that *none* of our speakers and *none* who

made comments or asked questions during the conference thought that this particular position could be reconciled with the specifically Christian faith – hence, for what it is worth, it may be said that in at least *one* respect English modernists are more conservative than some of our North American friends who think that one can do Christian theology without a *theos* or speak of Jesus without at the same time speaking of the God whose Son he was and whose will he obeyed.

It remains for me, as chairman of the conference planning committee and presiding officer at the Somerville meetings, to thank all who participated in this exciting and stimulating conference for their co-operation and courtesy. And to thank also the President of the Union, Dr Carpenter, for his willingness to contribute the final essay, which deals with liberalism in the Church of England and the necessity for integrity of thought in all religious speaking and doing. This essay, although it appears at the *end*, is actually the statement of the presuppositions and concerns which characterize, as we hope, Somerville 1967 and all other activity of the Modern Churchmen's Union.

NORMAN PITTENGER

*King's College  
Cambridge*

# SERMON TO THE MODERN CHURCHMEN'S CONFERENCE

24th July 1967

*A. M. Ramsey*

No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit.

*I Corinthians 12.3*

THE WORDS *Jesus is Lord* express the primitive creed of Christianity and the core of the Christian faith. *Jesus*: the word told of an historical person about whose life, words and actions much was known, and known not only in terms of the vehicle of a message but in terms of a human figure whose example was to be imitated by Christian people. A version of Christianity which made the Man Jesus unknown or irrelevant must differ vastly from the primitive Christianity wherein the name Jesus meant so much. *Is*: the word told of one who belongs not only to the past but to the contemporary, because he had been raised from death, Jesus 'whom not having seen you love'. *Lord*: the word told of more than Resurrection, it told of sovereignty. Without becoming polytheists or idolaters the first Christians were led to be worshippers of Jesus, giving to him the kind of homage due from creatures to a creator.

Now we call this christology, but no less significantly it was theology, for if there was a revolution in the attitude to Jesus who had been done to death by crucifixion and was now revered as Lord, there was no less a revolution in the understanding of God and God's ways in the world. Christology moved by a sure and inevitable process from *Christos* (Jesus as God's agent in history) to *Kyrios* (Jesus as sovereign over the world) and to *Logos* (Jesus as the total utterance of God and of the world's meaning). No less sure and inevitable was the movement of theology. A Jew who had believed in the reign of God in history can now, as a Christian, see the reign of God coming by means of a sacrificial death. A Greek who had believed in the unity and meaningfulness of the world in terms of an indwelling Logos can now, as a Christian, see that unity and

meaningfulness made known as Jesus. For both it was of supreme significance not only that Jesus was divine but that God was Christlike. God is Christlike, and in him is no un-Christlikeness at all. It was hard to grasp this faith, and harder to be true to its implications – the faith that God's majesty, omnipotence, sovereignty, 'God's presence and his very self and essence all divine' are known in the utter self-giving of death and resurrection. In the dereliction of Calvary there is the mighty power of God. It is St John who amongst the New Testament writers most signally draws this out. The glory seen in the dying of Jesus is the glory which the Son had with the Father before the world began.

It is this faith which the Church today strives to present to our modern world. Modernism or liberalism, in its proper meaning, is not a new-fangled eccentricity, but something inherent in Christianity; and the apostolic age knew it as the ceaseless effort to think out and to express the meaning of *Jesus is Lord* in different contexts of thought and culture as the Gospel moved across the world. Our Lord encouraged questioning and enquiry. 'What think you?' 'Whom do you say that I am?' 'Why even of your own selves do you not judge what is right?' 'How do you read?' And later, in the midst of the ardent missionary labours of the apostles, the asking of questions about the meaning of Jesus in relation to God and the world, and the meaning of God and the world in relation to Jesus continued. The sheer mental vigour of the early Church was astonishing. Yet the process which was in one aspect search and discovery was at the same time God-given. That was the other facet. 'Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven.' 'No one can come to me unless the Father draw him.' It was all God-given. And so the apostle says, 'No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except through the Holy Spirit'. The mind's understanding, the will's free choice, the heart's conviction, the mouth's confession were possible only through an enabling divine power within a man. And here we have one of Christianity's paradoxes: all is of man's freedom, and yet all is of God's gift and rule. We must use our minds and reach conclusions; it is the Spirit who guides us. In thinking of this paradox I know of no greater help than John Oman's superb *Grace and Personality*. But in practice it helps us if we remember that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus. It is as we try to let ourselves be ruled in his practical obedience, in the way of the Cross, that our minds are illuminated, for the revelation which we are studying has the Cross at its heart. We must not

forget the proximity in the Last Discourse of 'he shall guide you into all the truth' and 'he shall shew you the things that are coming'; and the 'things that are coming' include first the descent to the Kidron Valley and the garden and the return to the house of Caia-phas, the praetorium and the hill of Golgotha. With the Spirit of the Crucified ruling our lives our minds will be helped as they try to be open to every kind of truth which the world, created by God, yields to us for the understanding of the Word-made-flesh.

But now for the contemporary task. The task is the interpretation of *Jesus is Lord* amidst all the light and all the darkness which the modern world brings. In discharging this task it is easy to ask wrong questions and to use wrong presuppositions. The older modernism, the modernism of Girton 1921, did both. It allowed certain assumptions to blind it to aspects of the divine revelation in the Gospel and to narrow its understanding of the modern world. But much has happened between Girton 1921 and Somerville 1967, and it is now for a newer liberalism to learn from the world's contemporary sciences while avoiding the world's misleading assumptions and to practise a far greater openness. It must be an openness to the lessons to be learnt from the contemporary world and an openness also to the height and depth of the revelation of mercy and judgement in the Gospel.

I think of some of our tasks. There is the question of the Jesus of history. The men of Girton 1921 looked for an historical Jesus whose message was in contrast with the theology of the post-Resurrection Church, and believed that there was a sharp distinction between biographical fact and theological interpretation. Taught by form criticism, we now read the gospels in the context of the preaching and worship of the early Christian communities, and know that the rigid contrast between fact and interpretation is untenable. But form criticism has failed to explain the portrait of Jesus as wholly the product of the early Church. I quote David Jenkins's recent Bampton lectures: 'I do not feel the thesis of the community as the primary creative force in the construction of the things concerning Jesus is by any means the most credible hypothesis. . . . I suggest that the records as they stand require an historical personality before they will permit of a creative, responsive community.' If a new quest of the historical Jesus is now on its way it will avoid the mistakes of the older quest, it will eschew the rigid distinction between fact and interpretation, it will know that a biography of Jesus is unattainable, and yet it will be sure that the

Man Jesus is knowable, not just as an incognito in which deity is concealed or as an existential 'faith-event' but as a Man in the quality of whose manhood there is the image of the true God.

But Somerville 1967 has questions far more radical to face. It is not only how we understand the story of Jesus in relation to God and man, and how we find Jesus to be meaningful. Rather are men and women asking how man is meaningful at all, and whether the idea of meaningfulness has any validity in the world in which we live. Here as Christians we reply not primarily with certain types of thought or language but with the fact of Jesus, and especially Jesus dying an ignominious death and Jesus convincing man of his life after death; and clinging to this fact we say: Here is meaningfulness, here is Man in his true meaning, here is what we mean by God, here is sovereignty in a seemingly chaotic world.

There are those who put forward the 'death of God' concept. This concept, as I understand it, means that some good and religious people are taking with seriousness the fact that One who was divine died, died in utter self-negation and destruction; and facing the reality of Christ's dereliction they shrink from saying glibly 'Christ died, but God remains omnipotent', and in so shrinking they pass on to a kind of Hegelian theory of deity dying and rising within the historical process. We who are Christians holding the apostolic faith hold that this concept is as much mythology as metaphysics, and we see in the love of Christ's dereliction on Calvary the love which is the essence of Godhead transcendent and eternal, Godhead whom his creatures worship, Godhead no less divine for sharing in the agonies of history and humanity.

But while we can state the theological answer to the 'death of God' concept, it is for us – if people are to listen to us – to be sensitive to the dereliction of goodness in history which causes the death of God devotees to speak as they do. We must feel what they feel if we are to give an answer to them. No one can say *Jesus is Lord* except through the Holy Spirit. The message is that meaningfulness in respect of Man and sovereignty in respect of God are seen in the self-giving love of Jesus, and that those who share in this self-giving love and live by it are on the road to understanding. But just because no one can say *Jesus is Lord* except through the Holy Spirit, this answer will not be conveyed by the language we talk, or the doctrine we believe, apart from lives in which the lordship of Jesus is known, 'bearing in the body the dying of Jesus that the life of Jesus also may be shewn in our mortal flesh'.

## THE PLACE OF JESUS CHRIST IN WORLD RELIGIONS

*E. G. Parrinder*

IS THE World Council of Churches in heresy? This question has been asked since 1962 by Professor Nels Ferré of Andover Newton Theological School. 'Heresy' is a negative word, the opposite of 'orthodoxy' and fundamentally related to it, yet it has an unpleasant air of infidelity. Generally used by larger bodies of smaller ones, to turn it against the World Council is certainly bold, almost like another Athanasius. Ferré attacks the Basis adopted at New Delhi in 1961, which declared that the constituent churches of the World Council 'confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures'. This statement, says Ferré, is formally heretical, 'docetic' and 'idolatrous'. To say that 'Jesus is God' is docetic; it makes no mention of the humanity of Jesus. It is idolatrous, because the orthodox faith has not been that Jesus is simply God, which suggests God the Father and the error of Patripassianism, but that he is the Son of God.

Ferré is not alone in suspecting in the adoption of this Basis an ecumenical totalitarianism, a world movement become exclusive in a struggle for power. Not only will Unitarians be excluded from the World Council, but also other movements which object to formal creeds, such as the Quakers and the Salvation Army. The development of this Basis is interesting. In form it could be traced back to a declaration of the YMCA in 1855, but more immediately it was proposed at the Amsterdam Council in 1948 by a committee of fourteen. Any churches that wanted a change were asked to say so; but although the Friends of Philadelphia, the Remonstrants of Holland, and the Presbyterians of Australia sent in objections these were turned down. However, the Lutheran Church of Norway proposed the addition of 'according to the Scriptures', and this was adopted. Ferré calls this 'indiscriminate biblicism', for there are few, if any, sure New Testament texts which say plainly that 'Jesus is God'.



It is tempting to illustrate similar ecumenical totalitarianism in this country from the steam-rolling of criticism to some of the proposals for Anglican-Methodist unity, but that is beyond our present concern. Ecumenical totalitarianism, however, may also be aimed at the other religions of the world. There is more than a suspicion that the closing of the ranks is a preparation for an onslaught on the great religions of Asia, which for the past hundred years, at least, have been said alternately to be decaying or reviving. But they will not disappear easily, any more than the Pope has succumbed to Bunyan's gibe that 'he can now do little more than sit in his cave's mouth . . . biting his nails'. Following on Karl Barth's complete rejection of all other religions as 'sin', the 'work of godless man', the missionary interpretations of Hendrik Kraemer have blighted serious study and creative encounter with men of other faiths. A recent American symposium says that 'during the last twenty-five years much of our mission theology was dominated by a dead-end concept of absolute discontinuity between the Christian Gospel and the non-Christian religions'. But the Barthian rejection has not had much effect on the religions of Asia. While there have been many converts among illiterates in Africa and Asia, the number of conversions from educated Hindus and Buddhists has been tiny, and from Muslims virtually non-existent.

Ferré says that the Basis of the World Council 'constitutes a false obstacle to communications with the other religions of the world'. His critics have been quick to pick this up. E. A. Payne of the Baptist Union remarks rather slyly that apparently Ferré 'looks forward to a conversation among the religions of the world in which Baha'is and Hindus will not be presented by Christians with any claim that Jesus is God'. This is said to be the 'scandal' of Christianity, though it is more true that the real scandal of Christianity, all down the ages, has been its intolerance, and open persecution, of which the World Council may show yet only the first signs, but which is well illustrated by the actions of Roman Catholics in Vietnam or Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa.

The comparative study of religions brings some consolation in the discovery that all religions have what we call 'our unhappy divisions'. The divisions show the individuality of religious minds, but they have rarely been so widespread or so acrimonious as in Christianity. The many Buddhist sects, for example, are by preference called 'schools' by Buddhists, for they have much in common. In Hinduism modern extreme tolerance declares that all religions

are one, but acceptance of other ways of belief and worship can claim support as far back as the Bhagavad Gītā about the second century BC. And in Islam not only are most Muslims Sunnis, with only slight differences, but even Shī'a Islam shows little divergence in acts of worship and the pillars of faith.

The early divisions of Christianity were partly, though not entirely, christological, and these marked relations with other religions. From the early chapters of the Qur'ān the divisions of Christians are noticed and deplored: 'the sects disagreed among themselves' (Qur'ān 19.38, etc.). Muhammad believed himself to be inspired by God in the true succession of the biblical prophets and Jesus; he claimed to confirm the Gospel and protect it. He said that Christians were 'nearest in love' to Muslims, and praised the gentleness and piety of their monks. His persecuted followers took refuge in Christian Ethiopia, and when Christian delegations visited the Prophet in Medina he allowed them to pray in his own mosque, turning to the east as they did so. After his death friendly relationships were often established, Christians and Muslims sharing places of worship, and mystics for the first two centuries often living together. But already the divisiveness of Christianity made Muhammad also remark, 'the Christians say, "The Jews have no ground to stand on", though they both recite the Book'. He saw 'enmity and hatred' among them, and said they should not be chosen as friends. Finally he commended their divisions to God: 'had God so willed, he would have made you one community, but he has not done so in order that he might try you in regard to what has come to you; so strive to be foremost in what is good' (2.107; 5.53).

The divisions of Christians were a problem to later Muslims. An Islamic historian said acidly that 'where there are ten Christians there are eleven different opinions'. And the great Persian mystic Rūmī in the thirteenth century supposed that the Christians had been misled by a deceitful vizier of a Jewish king who gave a different scroll to each of the twelve amīrs (apostles) of the Christians, each with different ordinances contradicting the others. The vizier appointed each of the amīrs separately his caliph or vicar of God, telling each to imprison or kill his rivals, and after his death the Christians quarrelled over the amīric succession and hundreds of thousands were slain. But then Rūmī goes on to say that this vizier and his followers 'had no scent of the unicolority of Jesus'. For Jesus is often compared in Muslim mystical writings to a dyer in whose pure vat coloured garments become as simple and one-

coloured as light. So the differences lie not in the real nature of the Way, but only in the form of doctrine.

Muhammad, of course, misunderstood the Christian doctrines of Son of God and Trinity. It can be argued that he never denied the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. But his misunderstandings are not surprising, because despite his great religious earnestness and intense desire to learn all he could about the Bible, it seems that there was no Arabic translation of the New Testament and no Christian priest or church in Mecca in his day, the sixth and seventh centuries AD. Mecca is only a few hundred miles from the heartlands of Christianity, and one wonders what the Christians were doing all those centuries to have neglected its evangelization. No doubt squabbling among themselves. But the entire history of religions might have been changed if Muhammad had received instructed and not hearsay knowledge of Christian doctrine.

One of the very greatest tragedies was Muhammad's misunderstanding of the Cross. With the very best intentions, trying to defend Jesus against attacks, Muhammad was led to deny the reality of his death: 'they did not kill him, and did not crucify him, but it seemed to them as such' (4.156). This denial was probably due to Docetism, which was not merely an early Christian heresy but has dogged Christianity all down the ages and is apparent today. Yet this statement was a great tragedy, for it is held by virtually all Muslims that Jesus did not die on the Cross, but 'God raised him to himself'. There is an Ascension without the Crucifixion. A few brave attempts are now being made to amend this orthodox Muslim teaching, in the light of not only Christian but also secular historical views of the real physical death of Jesus. Dr Kamel Hussein has made a moving historical reconstruction in *City of Wrong*, worthy of Lenten reading for a Muslim understanding of the rejection of Christ by mankind. He suggests that Jesus was crucified 'in intention'. But there is a wide distance between intention and fact.

The place of Jesus Christ in the Qur'ān and the Islamic religion is one of honour. Jesus is called Messiah, Son of Mary, Messenger, Prophet, Servant, Word and Spirit of God. To early mystics he was the pattern of ascetic life, and the martyr Hallāj declared that he would die in the religion of the Cross, as he literally did. Nevertheless, despite Hallāj and a few others, Muslim orthodox teachers and mystics alike have rejected the Christian doctrine of 'incarnation' (*hulūl*) or 'identification' (*ittihād*)

with God. The medieval theologian al-Ghazālī, the Aquinas of Islam, and often as dull, wrote a long 'Excellent Refutation of the Divinity of Jesus Christ according to the Gospels'. Ghazālī had a good knowledge of the Bible, as many Muslim theologians have had, past and present. He declared that ordinary Christians were often shaky and uneasy in their beliefs, and theologians leant too heavily on the authority of Aristotle for the unity of the soul and body, and hence of the divine and human in Jesus. Ghazālī dismisses this and turns to the Gospels. But his chief texts are from John, and his method is to declare that the texts are metaphorical, in verses such as 'I and my Father are one'. He praises Paul, however, more than some later critics, and says that his verse, 'There is one God . . . and one Lord', is a 'truly admirable demonstration'. Then he turns to Mark and quotes the cursing of the fig tree, the ignorance of the day and hour, and the cry of dereliction on the Cross. These establish, he says, 'a person whose human nature is evident, clearly established'. We should agree with this.

For Islam, Jesus is a man. 'Both he and his mother ate food', says the Qur'ān when justifying Muhammad's eating habits. Jesus is not a mere man, for no Prophet and Apostle is such. He is called 'only an Apostle', but so is Muhammad himself. The Virgin Birth is taught twice in the Qur'ān, but it is explained as due to the power of God; 'he says "Be", and it is'. This might be regarded as more satisfactory than what Brunner called the 'biological inquisitiveness' of some theories of the Virgin Birth. Yet there is a mystery about Jesus in the Qur'ān, and a certain uniqueness that continued in the veneration which mystics felt for him saying, 'Take Jesus as your pattern', or 'Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets but Jesus is the Seal of the Saints'.

But in due course Muhammad became the ideal central figure for Islam. His sinlessness, though not stated in the Qur'ān, was early asserted, along with that of Jesus, Mary, and all the prophets. Muslims believe that Muhammad is their constant intercessor, except the extreme Wahhābī who hold that he will only become this at the divine invitation at the judgement.

That God is one, sole and unique, is the basic dogma of Islam, and no other religion, not even the Old Testament, has taught such absolute transcendence. God is the sole creator, actor, will. If ever there was a God 'up there', Islam has taught it. Yet it is a salutary lesson of the history of religions that such absolute transcendence could not be maintained, at least in practised religion. If God is the

sole existent, there is no gulf between the Wholly Other and man. God himself spans the gulf, and mystics were soon teaching that to say 'there is no god but God' means that God is one with man. One of the most famous sayings of Hallāj was:

I am He whom I love, and He whom I love is I,  
We are two spirits dwelling in one body.

The Shī'a Islam devotion to the Imāms, the beatified leaders, and the expectation of the Mahdī, have given expression to the personal side of devotion. But throughout Islam the rise of numerous saint cults gave scope for devotion, and ancient holy places were baptized into Islam as they were in catholic Europe. There are no images, of course, in Muslim worship, no stained-glass windows or wall-paintings. But there are countless texts from the Qur'ān, in beautiful script, that instruct and inspire. In the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, on the site of the old Temple, are written all the verses of the Qur'ān that refer to Jesus. In the Aqsa mosque nearby are footprints attributed to Jesus and Moses. But in many mosques the name of God is written on one side of the end wall, beside the niche of prayer direction, and the name of Muhammad on the other.

God has no associates, no equals, but the basic confession of faith is twofold: 'I confess that there is no God but God; I confess that Muhammad is the Apostle of God'. Religious man, it seems, cannot get on without some personal representation of his faith, even in the most iconoclastic religion. To criticize Muhammad, as some Christians do still, is regarded by Muslims to be as wicked as Christians regard criticisms of Jesus. We may look at the historical person, so much easier with Muhammad than many other figures, and see the grandeur and the weakness, polygamy and warfare. The Muslim sees the mediating figure who was hailed by Hassān at his death as 'second only to God', and by Muhammad Ali today as the 'Saviour of sinful humanity'.

To turn from Islam and the Semitic world to the religions of farther Asia is to enter another realm of thought. Jesus is not mentioned in the Indian texts, of course, but Indian religious doctrines and attitudes are important for Christian theology today. If Islam is the religion which took transcendentalism to its farthest extremes, Hinduism illustrates the opposite tendency, the extremes of immanence and pantheism. And Buddhism seemed to draw the

logical or practical conclusion, by apparently denying both God and the soul altogether. It is of the greatest significance for the history of religions that these extremes also could not be maintained. The pressures of religious need were too insistent, and modifications appeared that violated theory.

The classical scriptures of the Hindus, the Vedas, are held to be divinely inspired and in the olden days, at least, were regarded as the sole truth beside which all other scriptures were false. Hindus give allegorical interpretations to these hymns, but to the Westerner, however sympathetic, the Vedas appear as the clearest polytheism, with multitudes of gods, of heaven, earth and the elements. Few of these divinities appear admirable to us, and it is significant that European scholars singled out the obscure Varuna (perhaps Uranus) as 'supreme' because he is one of the most moral deities. Morality is thought to be a good mark in a god, to those brought up in the Semitic traditions. But these gods never spoke to man, there is no revelation; the traffic is all the other way, from man to god. Yet the Vedic gods are personal, all too personal, numerous and confusing.

In the Upanishads or Vedānta, the 'end of the Vedas', which came afterwards, the problems of polytheism are clearly felt. In a famous dialogue the gods are thinned down from three thousand, three hundred and six to thirty-three, to nine, six, three, two, one and a half, and one. It is that one, the Brahman, which becomes the centre of interest. He, or it, for it is beyond any male-female attributes, is indescribable. Brahman is only to be spoken of by negatives, not only 'immortal and invisible' but 'not this, not this'. Some concession is made to religion in the admission that there may be a Brahman 'with qualities' (*sa-guna*), but all the trend of the early Upanishads is towards the Brahman 'without qualities' (*nir-guna*).

Having merged all the gods into one, the only duality that remained was between God and the human soul, Brahman and *ātman*. The classic dialogues that consider this problem take nine examples, and at the end of each is repeated the dogma 'thou art That', you yourself are the self of the whole universe. This phrase 'thou art That' has been taken as the essence of Brahminism or philosophical Hinduism. Taken literally it is non-dualism or monism, the identification of all with all. It would seem to be the end of prayer and religion, since the I-Thou relationship is dissolved into undifferentiated unity.

Non-dualism is often put forth as the highest philosophy of religion. Modern Vedāntists, or Neo-Vedāntists, of the Huxley-Isherwood type, hail this pantheism as the Perennial Philosophy which crowns all religions. Dr Radhakrishnan, the philosopher-president of India, has set out non-dualism in learned and syncretistic ways, making the sole concession to the West some kind of acceptance of reality in the visible world. The most famous of classical Indian philosophers, Shankara (eighth century AD), was such a non-dualist that an eminent Indian critic declares that Shankara was a crypto-Buddhist, which Shankara would have resented since he combated Buddhism. The strange thing is that Shankara, despite his monistic philosophy, wrote hymns to the personal gods, Vishnu and Shiva. A philosopher writing hymns is an unusual sight, yet Shankara justified the use of hymns as helps to worship, though the wise will pass beyond them, as beyond personal worship too. It is significant that Shankara was uneasy with texts that taught personal devotion and the avatar doctrine.

But classical Hindu philosophy was not all Shankara. Rāmānuja (eleventh century) was just as great a thinker and he taught a 'modified non-dualism' or 'difference non-difference'. He believed that God and man are one, men are the body of God, but they are not the same as God, and there will always be a difference which allows for personal devotion. This is comparable with the distinction made by mystics who seek union but not identity with God. And Madhva (thirteenth century) was a frank dualist, who claimed that the great phrase had been wrongly interpreted and, by an ingenious emendation which textual critics will appreciate, he changed it to 'thou art not That'. Madhva's approach was too intellectual. It was Rāmānuja who gave philosophical respectability to the great movements of devotion that spread through India, wherein love and passion entered religious adoration to an extent unparalleled elsewhere.

Before all this the Bhagavad Gītā had led the way, from about the second century BC. This most famous of all Hindu writings is about the length of St John's Gospel, and equally tantalizing and profound. It is the most ecumenical of books, not to say syncretistic; it praises the way of knowledge, the way of works, and the way of devotion, as all leading to salvation. Even among religious books the Gītā is distinguished by lack of consistency, and doctrines old and new jostle in its pithy verses.

The Gītā begins with the non-dualism of the Upanishads, but

already from chapter two its major doctrine is stated, which is devotion 'to Me', to a personal Deity. When it discusses the problems of action (*karma*), it not only teaches detachment from results but reinforces this by saying that one should act by looking with devotion (*bhakti*) to the Lord. Then a further advance states that the Lord himself is ever acting. Not that he needs to, but he sustains the world, and if he ceased to act not only would it be a bad example, but world destruction would follow.

The divine work is further expounded in the doctrine of the avatar, which is one of the most original contributions of the *Gītā*, or the whole epic *Mahābhārata*, to religious thought. The word avatar (*avatāra*, down-coming, descent) is not used in the *Gītā*, though it occurs elsewhere in the Epic of which the *Gītā* is a part. But the doctrine is certainly there, in famous words: 'Whenever right declines, and unrighteousness arises, then I send forth myself . . . Age by age I come into being' (*Gītā* 4.7-8).

The avatar doctrine is still of great importance today. It is often said that Jesus is an avatar, and that modern men understand the Incarnation most easily through this doctrine. The avatar teaching is repeated several times in the *Gītā*, and is part of its view of the deity as unmanifest, yet coming to manifestation. Basic to the belief is the harmony of the universe, for it is to maintain the balance of right (*dharma*) that the avatar comes. This common Hindu notion seems inconsistent with monism, for if God is everything then disharmony is his as well and he would not come to set it right. The *Gītā* does not appear to see this, but its religious instinct leads it on to personal theism.

Rudolf Otto in his book *The Original Gītā*, in which he traces several recensions, back to an Ur-*Gītā*, is sure that a real incarnation is taught. For him the difference between Christianity and Hinduism is not merely incarnation, but expiation. Without going into this it may be agreed that the avatar of the *Gītā* has real human features. The avatar is the embodied Krishna, who was born, and dies later in the Epic. The *Gītā* speaks of Krishna as eating, playing, resting and sleeping. He is visible and embodied. And now at last God speaks to man in India. The Vedic deities said little. The 'thou art That' of the Upanishads precludes conversation. A divinity without qualities has nothing to say, subject and object are identical and featureless. But in the *Gītā* there is lengthy divine teaching, with Arjuna chipping in occasionally, like Moses or Jeremiah.

The *Gītā* is not only immanental and incarnational. In chapter



eleven it has a great transcendental vision, beside which even the visions of Daniel and Revelation are mild. And it is after this terrifying vision that there comes not only love to God, but the divine love to man. Krishna shows grace to Arjuna, comforts him in his fright, says that he is dear to him, very dear, and in the final verses of the book declares that he is 'exceedingly beloved' by God.

The *Gītā* manifests only one avatar, though it says he comes into being 'age after age', and repetition is of the essence of its doctrine. The larger Epic has some ten avatars, descending into the animal realm to include figures of cosmic myth. But the two noblest avatars are Krishna and Rāma, the warrior-king. Whether either of these were historical figures, in the scientific sense, their dates are quite speculative. Yet Indians believe that they were historical and treat them as real incarnations.

After the Epic the number of avatars grows, for the principle of repetition allows this, until in the *Bhāgavata Purāna* (ninth century AD) there are twenty-two avatars. The Buddha, who was certainly a historical figure, appears here and elsewhere as an avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu. Sometimes he is depicted as a true teacher of right, sometimes he is one who was allowed to mislead men in these last evil days. In later writing, too, the story of Krishna is highly developed, as is Rāma in the other great epic, the *Rāmāyana*. Krishna's birth, mischievous childhood, romantic youth, heroic manhood and final death, are all detailed. The loves of Krishna bring a powerful erotic element into the religious literature, which has been compared with the Song of Songs but goes far beyond it. The character of Krishna changes from the lofty charioteer of the *Gītā* to the lover of souls, where passion becomes a further reason for his entry into the world. The Chaitanya movement (sixteenth century) illustrates this, with passion and ecstasy. Then the avatar concept is even more loosely applied to include Chaitanya, Rāmakrishna, Mahātma Gāndhi, and any great man.

The success of the *Gītā*, the strength of devotional movements in all Hindu cults, and the teachings of philosophers like Rāmānuja, demonstrate the power of personal theism. Nowhere has deity been stripped of all attributes as thoroughly as in Hinduism. The philosophy proceeded from gods 'up there' to a completely neuter mind. This was not atheistic, since spirit was the only reality. But it was not far off, and it was against this background that Buddhism and Jainism arose. Yet such a divinity, without symbol or character, could not satisfy the religious needs of men. The *Gītā* came, and opened the

floodgates to personal religion. God is transcendent, beyond the manifest, but he is also present and visible, and the men of simple faith and love see him best. After the great vision Arjuna asks which are best: those who seek God as the imperishable unmanifest, or those who love him in devotion? For once Krishna does not hesitate. The men of faith and love are the best yogis. It is true that by great efforts men can attain the goal of the unmanifested, but the way is hard and only few find it; whereas the men of devout love, 'intent on Me', reach God alone and delight in the welfare of all beings.

There is not time to tell how Buddhism, with many handicaps, reached not dissimilar religious positions. But a few remarks can be made. It has often been said that Buddhism is atheistic, but reading the texts gives a different picture. There is never any denial of the existence of God in the extensive Buddhist canon. For in Hinduism there was no single supreme God to deny, at the time Buddhism began (fifth century BC). Buddhism probably arose before the Gītā, which in some ways may be regarded as the Hindu reaction against early monastic Buddhism. There was no single supreme Creator in Hinduism, and although the Buddhist texts sometimes discuss theories of the eternity of the world, they prefer to leave such questions as the 'great indeterminates', which do not profit to salvation. But there are plenty of other gods about, and from the earliest texts they play many roles. They wait on the Buddha, receiving him in a golden net at his birth, the great Brahmā (not Brahman) coming down to implore the Buddha to preach after his Enlightenment, and the gods watch at his death. The gods are never denied, they are always present, but the Buddha is superior to them. He is, from the outset, and despite his clear humanity, presented as the teacher of gods and men, the greatest in the world, and the supreme Lord.

More remarkable is the virtual ignorance in the Buddha himself and early Buddhism of the Hindu debates on the impersonal Brahman. Once again, this is not denied, because it is not known. Only a few texts, of disputed interpretation, refer to the way of Brahman, and becoming Brahman. Perhaps the teaching of the impersonal Brahman was current only in rather closed Brahminical circles, to which the Buddha, as a member of the warrior caste, was not admitted, or at any rate had not applied for membership. This ignorance of Brahman may partly explain the Buddha's com-

plex teaching about no-self (*an-ātman*), which would look very different according to whether Brahman is accepted or not.

It is sometimes said that if Buddhism has no supreme God it has a substitute in Nirvāṇa, that state of bliss which is only to be spoken of in negatives, like the Hindu 'not this, not this'. But while Nirvāṇa is a constant goal, it may be doubted whether it has the kind of omnipresence that divinity needs, at any rate in Buddhist eyes. It is more likely that for the Buddha himself the transcendent reality was Dharma, the law, right, doctrine, virtue, way, religion – perhaps best rendered in English as the Truth. Gautama became a Buddha, an enlightened one, by realization of the Truth.

Dharma, Truth, is transcendent and eternal. The Buddha did not invent it, and he would not have thought of himself as the founder of a religion. But he realized the supreme wisdom, and in his famous first sermon, in the Deer Park at Benares, he 'Set in Motion the Wheel of Dharma'. In this he is in line with Indian tradition. The Jains had a similar idea. The opening words of the *Gītā* are of the 'Field of Dharma'. Its avatar doctrine is declared to be in order to re-establish Dharma when it is languishing.

But just as in Hinduism abstract truths needed clothing in personal form, so it was in Buddhism. No doubt it was this which made the ethical philosophy into religion. The Buddha himself becomes the embodiment of Truth. The Threefold Refuge formula, which is recited daily by every pious Buddhist in southern Asia, and which goes back to the earliest texts and inscriptions, runs: 'I go to the Buddha for refuge, I go to the Dharma for refuge, I go to the Sangha (order) for refuge'. It is the Dharma indeed, but already in second place, following its exemplar the Buddha, and succeeded by the living community.

The avatar idea is not peculiar to Hinduism; it has clear parallels in Buddhism and Jainism. Truth is eternal, but it declines in the world, and every age thinks it is worse than the good old days; young people are irreligious and immoral, say the old in every generation. So a succession of Buddhas and Jinas comes to restore the Truth. We commonly speak of *the* Buddha, but every Buddhist knows that this is a title, like Christ, and moreover it is repeated and held by many others. The Mahāyāna or Northern Buddhists speak of countless Buddhas, hundreds of thousands of them according to the great Lotus Scripture. But in the more conservative Hīnayāna or Theravāda Buddhism it is believed that there have been some twenty-five Buddhas, in the present cosmic eon. There are Buddhas

past, and the eschatological figure, Maitreya, the Buddha to come.

As the avatar is a repeated incarnation, so is the Buddha. However, the Theravāda texts preserve a kind of uniqueness for the present Buddha, who is supreme in the whole world in our own times. 'Have there been Buddhas in the past?', it is asked. The answer is 'Yes'. 'Will there be Buddhas to come?' 'Yes'. 'Is there more than one Buddha now?' 'No'. The Tathāgata, the teacher of gods and men, is unique in this present world era.

We cannot stay on these fascinating problems, but perhaps enough has been said to hint that Buddhism is a fully-fledged religion, with more of theology than some would admit. Dr E. Conze has shown that early British students of Buddhism were attracted by what they thought to be the straightforward, non-supernatural, nature of 'primitive Buddhism'. They had little time for the pantheons and miracles of Mahāyāna, but as administrators and scholars in the old empire in Ceylon and Burma, or staying at home in the British Museum library, found Theravāda Buddhism like plain ethics without the absurd mythologies of religion. This fitted in well with nineteenth-century Utilitarianism. But if these crypto-Buddhists had ever set foot in a Buddhist temple, even in the most conservative lands like Burma or Siam, they would have been horrified. Far from illustrating a refined Protestantism or agnosticism, these temples were and are full of idols and incense! Burmese and Thai schoolchildren to this day learn the traditional myths about the Buddha, from the canonical texts which are so full of miracles as to make the Bible look like *Honest to God*.

Once again there is the spectacle of the power of religion to develop doctrines to meet its own devotional needs. And if the Buddha himself by-passed, without denying, the gods, and taught a system of salvation through an abstract Truth, his followers soon clothed this ideal in flesh, literally, in the succession of Buddhas. The Buddhas indeed have all the attributes of divinity: transcendence, immanence, incarnation.

It may now perhaps be clear that some of the problems that face Christian doctrine have been tackled in other religions over many centuries. A few more remarks may illustrate some attitudes towards Christ today.

Many Hindus now speak of Jesus as an avatar, for if they are numberless then an additional one makes no difference. Mahāyāna Buddhists also would accept him, though to the Theravāda, Jesus

could be an honoured teacher, but not supreme like the Buddha Gautama. However, the Gospel miracles, which often trouble us, are no problem to Hindus or Buddhists. It would be remarkable if there were no miracles.

Jesus, called Messiah as a title without explanation, is one of the most honoured figures in Islam. His Virgin Birth is taught in the Qur'ān; only Adam and Eve had similar miraculous births. Further, Jesus was the only man who did not die; this is an unfortunate interpretation, but it adds to his uniqueness. Though the Qur'ān records no miracles by Muhammad, it freely refers to Jesus making clay birds, healing the sick, cleansing lepers and raising the dead. Again, the miraculous is no problem. Kamel Hussein, speaking on miracles, declared that they are true independently of history. Hamlet, he said, never lived or spoke in the way we know, but his story and words are true for millions throughout the world.

Of course it is true that other religions have not yet fully faced the revolution in thought necessitated by the scientific outlook of modern times, with its rejection or re-interpretation of miracle. No doubt that will come, and where it has appeared already it has sometimes deprived modern Arabs or Burmese of all religious faith.

Similarly the critical study of the Bible has had no parallel in Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism. The Islamic traditions may be criticized, but the Qur'ān is untouchable, the very Word of God. Indeed Muslims feel that by our criticisms we have sold the pass, or proved that several gospels are not really the original Gospel delivered by God to Jesus. We have undermined religion. When Pakistan was at cross purposes with America some time ago, the newspapers there carried headlines declaring that Americans now say that God is dead.

A major difference between the Christian attitude to Jesus and that of other religions is his uniqueness. It is not his sinlessness, for all prophets, avatars and Buddhas are sinless. For Islam Jesus is a sinless prophet and Christ, but Muhammad is later and better; a belief that is reinforced by modern evolutionary assumptions that the later is sure to be better. For Hindus the notion of a single Incarnation, once for all, seems wrong, and to deny the constant working of the divine spirit. Yet a kind of uniqueness appears in the faith of the followers of Krishna, Rāma or Buddha.

A traditional Christian support for the uniqueness of Jesus is his divinity. He is God, and we are men. The Muslim denies the first, the Hindu the second. Man is actually or potentially divine, says

the Hindu. Rāmānuja, as was pointed out, believed that men are the body of God though always subordinate to him. Where is the place of the avatar in this relationship? He is God, akin to but not the same as man. The problems of the nature or substance of God and man are great, but in function and relationship there are clear differences.

A further difference between Jesus and the avatars may be said to be in his historicity. Some Christian scholars, we know, are not so sure of this today as men were formerly. An extreme view maintains that all we can know about Jesus is his name and that he was crucified. But other men were called Jesus, even in the New Testament, and crucifixion was a common form of punishment. A more moderate criticism would no doubt ascribe more historicity to Jesus than to either Krishna or Rāma. But despite the myths there is little reason to doubt that Gautama Buddha really lived, and Muhammad acted in the full light of history and is known, warts and all, yet he is exalted in devotion as 'second only to God'.

Perhaps moral judgements can be made between Christ and the avatars. Yet the lofty Krishna of the Gītā must be distinguished from the cowboy or playboy of later times. And the Buddha is one of the most noble characters of religious history. His teaching may be criticized as other-worldly, monastic, even pessimistic. All these judgements can be supported, and denied. Much is made today of the compassion of the Buddha, though he was more of a teacher than a healer or social reformer. The active compassion of Jesus is world famous, and culminating in the Cross it gives a manifestation of the love of God that is indeed unique. This compassion of Jesus has been followed in the countless social and healing activities of the churches, in every great city of Asia and Africa. Sometimes these are disparaged as 'mere good works', but they reflect a deeper doctrine, and they are the most distinctive and admired traits of Christianity today. In these good works the indirect influence of Christ is to be seen, probably far more widespread than direct conversions to the Christian religion, and imitated in some degree in other cultures in a sincere flattery.

On the other hand the old liberal picture of Jesus as a merely human teacher of morality does not seem adequate for the religious needs of mankind, or the survival of Christianity. 'Why do you object to calling Jesus God?', asked a Hindu swami. 'He should be the god of your choice.' This notion of a 'god of one's choice' (*ishta-devatā*) is common in Hinduism, but it may send a shiver through

a Christian or Muslim. We do not choose God, he chooses us, is the teaching of our transcendental religion.

Nevertheless there is some point in this Hindu question. If we worship, or even venerate, we are engaged in something more than mere ethical imitation. And the history of religion has shown that men need an object for devotion, great and noble, awe-inspiring and compassionate, one that they can understand, one who speaks and reveals, an incarnate Lord.

These are some of the problems that are raised by the study of religions, and there are many other problems. There is no doubt that modern christology needs re-shaping and re-presenting to the world. Much of it is unintelligible, conceived in the categories of Jewish and Greek thought of the early centuries that are no longer relevant. Yet in re-formulation the religious content of christology must not be so emptied away that nothing remains for devotion and faith to cling to. If this is done, then men will turn from the larger churches to more obscurantist movements because, despite their limitations, they have the stuff of religion in them. To refer to the ecumenical movement again, if it is a mere super-organization, concerned with the economy of resources, then it will be by-passed by what are called 'sects' or other 'bodies' which have a passion for devotion and world salvation.

No man, no school of theologians, perhaps no generation can hope to present a perfect christology, but neither must the effort to find one be neglected. The history of religions, becoming ever more popular, and showing the widespread interest in religion in this so-called 'secular' world, gives many clues to the fundamentals of faith. There are common elements to most religions. There are also distinctive features of each religion, and Christianity need not hide its own particularities. But the common elements can give encouragement in laying a firm foundation.

It is sometimes suggested that the study of other religions must weaken one's own faith. In fact the contrary is often true. Students of theology may be troubled by the destructiveness of biblical criticism. In the comparative study of religions they often find a strengthening of faith, in seeing how people in other traditions conceive of eternal reality.

## THE PREPARATION FOR CHRIST IN ISRAEL

Eric W. Heaton

## I

TO DISCOURSE on the preparation in Israel for Jesus Christ at the outset of a conference devoted to the study of christology inevitably involves one in the immodest suggestion that there is nothing to be learnt from subsequent contributions, since obviously it is impossible to go far in considering the theme of preparation without some sort of presupposition about what the preparation was for. It makes a great deal of difference whether the centre of the New Testament is held to be a bare *kerygma* proclaiming the death of Jesus, a liberal Rabbi, a man mythologized after the models of Qumran, or a historical person whose significance was discovered and grasped, rather than elaborated and distorted, in the faith of the community of the resurrection. It is the last of these alternatives which is presupposed in the title of this paper and a paragraph from Professor Moule's recent lectures may be allowed to amplify it: 'I say, then, again,' he writes, 'that *whereas* within the New Testament there is much condemnation of vice, and a certain amount of exhortation to virtue, both of which any pious Jew, and a good many of the pagan moralists too, would have endorsed; *whereas* within the New Testament community there was a warmth and effectiveness of social relationship which other religions have emulated and would have been glad to rival, *yet* the elements in the New Testament which a non-Christian would not share are precisely the ones which alone account for the Church's existence. They are those which relate to and depend on the Christian estimate of Jesus as crucified and raised from among the dead, and of man's relationship to God through him.'<sup>1</sup>

Jesus was crucified and raised from among the dead in Jerusalem in the first century AD. These facts of history immediately establish a connexion between Israel and Jesus which is immune from theological dubiety. 'The idea of the incarnation,' Professor James Barr has said, 'implies more than the assumption of "flesh" or

<sup>1</sup> C. F. D. Moule, *The Phenomenon of the New Testament* (1967), p. 15.



"humanity" or "human nature". The Word is incarnate not in general or universal humanity alone, but also in Jewish humanity more particularly. There is, moreover, a temporal fixation: it is not Jewish humanity generally, but the Jewish humanity of the first century AD. It is not unimportant that human nature implies the physical fleshly existence, for crucifixion and resurrection alike have meaning in this sense. But for our purposes here it is important to see that humanity means man as a linguistic being, with an articulate tradition expressed in a known culture or, as is most applicable in this case, a given folk-literature or a scripture with its interpretation. Incarnation brings God into a situation of political, social and intellectual life in this sense.<sup>2</sup> As first-century Palestinian Judaism was the matrix of the life and ministry of Jesus, the first and not the least significant contribution of Israel by way of preparation for his coming was simply to exist. This is not, I think, the resounding platitude which at first it seems, for the existence of Israel on any reckoning is a remarkable historical phenomenon and to begin to ask questions about it is to begin to understand why it means more to say that Jesus was born an Israelite than (let us say) a Roman. What *was* Israel? It was certainly not a *race*, even if Ezra would have welcomed the implied biological criterion. Nor is it properly categorized as a *nation*, since it was unified as a political organization only for a very brief period. It is clear that Israel must be classed as some sort of cultural unit, as a 'people'. But what was it that made Israel a 'people'? It was certainly not a distinctive language, nor a distinctive habitat; it was, rather, a distinctive faith.<sup>3</sup> Israel owed its existence as a people to a faith in God which, moreover, was distinctively related to history. It was so from the beginning and this relatedness of faith to history continued through the centuries, until (as Dr Caird has most recently reminded us<sup>4</sup>) Jesus presented his own ministry to Israel as involving the people in a spiritual crisis with unmistakable historical consequences.

## II

The existence of Israel as the people which provided the historical context of the incarnation prepared the way for an understanding of the personal 'event' of Jesus as being the locus of God's sovereign activity. It is important not to exaggerate the historical orientation

<sup>2</sup> James Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation* (1966), p. 157.

<sup>3</sup> John Bright, *Early Israel in Recent History Writing* (1956), pp. 113f.

<sup>4</sup> G. B. Caird, *Jesus and the Jewish Nation* (1966).

of first-century Judaism, since it was dominated by the authority of the Law<sup>5</sup> and characterized by a kind of exegesis which was equally indifferent to history – whether one thinks of the allegorizing of Philo or the fanciful word-play of the rabbis. Nevertheless, Israel in the time of Jesus had not abandoned the Hebrew Scriptures and, therefore, had not entirely lost touch with the historical emphasis of its heritage. On this point, the New Testament writers bear unmistakable witness. 'For Philo,' writes Dr Dodd, 'the Old Testament presents a picture without perspective; it is two-dimensional, on the flat. The writers of the New Testament, in comparison, show themselves aware of the historical perspective. Thus Paul notes the conflict of Elijah with Baal-worship, and Isaiah's announcement of the "remnant", as successive stages in a continuous process of "purposive selection" which was in operation for many centuries, and prepared the stage at last for the coming of Christ. Farther back in history, he is impressed by the long lapse of time between the covenant with Abraham and the promulgation of the Law on Sinai – 430 years, he computes, and he is not very far out by modern calculations. The author to the Hebrews, in spite of his Alexandrine proclivities, is acutely aware of the tedious centuries during which the fathers lived and died in faith, not having received the promises, because God had prepared some better thing for us. For him Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are not lay figures upon which to hang an allegory, but human beings who played their obscure part in the early stages of a process now visible in its completion. The evangelist Matthew, again, is interested in the run of the generations, from Abraham to David, from David to the Babylonian exile, from the exile to the birth of Christ. His chronology, indeed, is symbolic rather than exact, but it is clearly his intention to present the coming of Christ as the culmination of a real process in history. In the Acts of the Apostles, the speech of Stephen before his judges is almost a *cento* of quotations from the Old Testament, but a *cento* curiously unlike the linked series of allegorically interpreted texts which we find in Philo. Stephen's quotations mark the strictly historical sequence of events, from the call of Abraham to the apostasy of Solomon, at which point the survey breaks off as tension rises and argument is swallowed up in violence.'<sup>6</sup> Perhaps, as has been sug-

<sup>5</sup> Cf. G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (trans. D. M. G. Stalker), vol. 1 (1962), p. 91: 'But when the law was made absolute . . . Israel parted company with history.'

<sup>6</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Old Testament in the New* (1952), pp. 5f.; cf. *According to the Scriptures* (1952), pp. 127-133.

gested, this apostolic interpretation of the Old Testament in terms of God's purpose in history would not have been possible without the creative re-thinking of Jesus himself,<sup>7</sup> but his re-thinking seems in many respects to have been a re-discovery of the central tradition of Mosaic and Prophetic Yahwism.

The interpretation of the Old Testament in terms of the Old Testament's interpretation of history is one of the many features of current biblical theology which has attracted the critical scrutiny of Professor Barr. It is salutary to be warned against over-inflated balloon phrases like 'historical revelation' and 'the mighty acts of God' and to be compelled to ask more rigorously what we understand by 'revelation' and whether it lies in the kind of history which is open to critical investigation or, rather, in some *idea* of history. It is also salutary to be alerted to the danger of claiming the conviction that 'God acts in history' as a theological insight unique to Israel. 'It is possible,' writes Professor Barr, 'that this, like other elements of Hebrew thought, may be found to differ in degree, in pattern and in relation, from what is found in other peoples, but not to differ absolutely or to be capable of univocal theological evaluation. Claims for distinctiveness are always at the mercy of future archaeological discovery. The one fragment of Moabite literature, the Mesha' inscription, displays Chemosh "acting in history" in a manner remarkably similar to that of the God of Israel.'<sup>8</sup> To this cautionary example, there may be added the Cylinder of Cyrus, in which his conquest of Babylon is interpreted in terms of Marduk's 'acting in history', rather than, as Second Isaiah proclaimed, Yahweh himself (Isa. 45.1; 44.28; 46.11). Even more telling parallels may be found in Assyrian sources. Thus, for example, the Assyrian *Epic of Tukulti-Ninurta* of about 1220 BC explains that the Assyrians were able to plunder Babylon because the Babylonian gods, angry with the king of their people, fought on the Assyrians' side. At a later date, the seventh-century king, Esar-haddon, accounts for the destruction of Babylon by his predecessor, Sennacherib, in the following remarkably 'prophetic' terms; 'They (the citizens of Babylon) oppressed the weak, and gave him into the power of the strong. Inside the city there was tyranny, the receiving of bribes; every day without fail they plundered each other's goods; the son cursed his father in the street, the slave [abjured] his master, [the

<sup>7</sup> C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (1952), p. 110; C. F. D. Moule, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> James Barr, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

slave girl] did not listen to her mistress . . . Marduk, the Enlil of the gods, was angry and devised evil to overwhelm the land and destroy the peoples.<sup>9</sup>

Although, therefore, it cannot possibly be maintained that Israel was unique in interpreting history as the sphere of God's activity, there can be little doubt that divine action in history is central to Israel's way of thinking to an unparalleled degree.

Professor B. S. Childs, who acknowledges in a recent monograph the strength of the case against an over-glib use of the 'acts of God in history' as a unifying category and demonstrates how, in the case of the Assyrian crisis in the time of Isaiah, it is impossible to speak simply of a historical nucleus to which all the six interpretations in the Old Testament relate, nevertheless emphasizes the possibility of discovering common ground in the diversity of the Old Testament response which clearly differentiates it from its cultural context. 'It is particularly important,' he writes, 'that the biblical diversity be seen against the background of its ancient Near Eastern setting. This perspective often enables the interpreter to plot a common area within which all the Old Testament diversity functions, and yet distinct or different from the movements of the Near Eastern religions. In terms of the diverse reactions to the Assyrian crisis, there remain many elements which are shared by the majority of the biblical sources. Such themes as Yahweh's ability to direct the affairs of the world, his judgement on Assyria's boastful claims of autonomy, and his demand from Israel of an obedient response, appear through most of the Old Testament accounts. The case can be defended that seldom did Israel attempt cultic manipulation or magical incantation to influence the deity in the face of the enemy's threats.'<sup>10</sup>

The Assyrian crisis in the time of Isaiah affords a useful reminder that Israel's convictions about history were not confined to what is known as 'salvation-history', since divine action was also found in 'secular' history and there it brought not salvation but judgement. That is why we may agree with Professor Barr when he says that 'it is wrong to fasten too much to the brief and summary confession statement of *kerygma*-type, such as the well-known creed of Deuteronomy 26'.<sup>11</sup> It is wrong, not because (as he suggests) such an emphasis isolates the Wisdom tradition of the Old Testament, but

<sup>9</sup> W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (1960), p. 5; from R. Borger, *Asarhaddon*, pp. 12f.

<sup>10</sup> B. S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis* (1967), p. 125.

<sup>11</sup> Barr, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

because it ignores the interpretation of history which is distinctive of prophecy. The independent prophets were even more critical of *Heilsgeschichte* than Professor Barr, but, unlike him, they criticized it from history understood as the sphere of God's activity. Thus Amos, nurtured though he was in the tradition of Yahweh's choice and protection of his people (2.9, 10), nevertheless totally reversed its orthodox interpretation (3.2), and with unprecedented daring cast it into the maelstrom of 'secular' history to make it speak of Israel's judgement:

'Are you not like the Ethiopians to me,  
O people of Israel?' says the Lord.  
'Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt,  
and the Philistines from Caphtor  
and the Syrians from Kir?  
Behold, the eyes of the Lord God  
are upon the sinful kingdom,  
and I will destroy it from the  
surface of the ground' (9.7, 8).

Prophetic Yahwism was orientated not towards the past, but towards the imminent future as it bore down upon the present. It ruthlessly interpreted contemporary political history as superseding Israel's sacred history, finding Yahweh active and dealing directly with his chosen people in the imperialist policy of Assyria (Isa. 7.20; 10.5) and the devastating power of Babylon (Jer. 25.9; 27.6; cf. 43.10), just as Mosaic Yahwism had found Yahweh's 'mighty acts' in the Exodus from Egypt and the conquest of Canaan. It was always through history that Yahweh came to his people. If judgement is the first, paradoxical, and most characteristic word of the prophets, it is by no means the last. Many of them explicitly include as the climax of Yahweh's new and direct dealing with his people promises of their restoration to that relationship he had intended from the beginning of their history, by, for example, a New Covenant (Jer. 31.31-34) or a Second Exodus (Isa. 43.1-7, 16-21; 45.13; 48.20-22; 49.8-13; 55.12, 13; cf. Hos. 2.14, 15). Whether or not it includes such vision beyond judgement, the essence of the preaching of the prophets is that the old basis of Yahweh's dealing with Israel is being done away and that a new one is about to take its place – *in and through Yahweh's sovereign ordering of history*.

### III

The connexion between Israel's understanding of Yahweh's

sovereign ordering of history and Israel's distinctive articulation of eschatology has been clear (but not always recognized) ever since twentieth-century biblical scholarship liberated the message of Advent from those redoubtable twin authorities, *The Oxford English Dictionary* and the medieval church, which (as Oliver Quick pointed out long ago) had transformed this way of understanding the historical and ultimate purpose of God into a speculation about the destiny of the individual soul.<sup>12</sup> The re-discovered biblical view has been well expressed by Dr J. A. T. Robinson: 'For the Prophets eschatology was a way of understanding history, the history in which they were living, *sub specie finis*: they looked out on the world scene and set it always in the light of the ultimate meaning and judgement of God. In order to express and clarify that meaning and judgement, as it came to them even now through the relativities of current events, they were driven to myths of the future in which the blacks and whites were no longer blurred and confused, as in the baffling contradictions of the present. But through such pictures of the Last Days their concern was always to bring to bear upon the *present* the promise and the warning contained in the end of the ways of God. They were concerned with the End, not for providing a map of the future, but for supplying a criterion for the present.'<sup>13</sup> It is a matter of some importance for our theme of *praeparatio evangelica* to decide how far the End which, it is recognized, was a criterion for the present was also a hope for the future. Dr Robinson answers the question with a clear affirmative: 'Like every Jew, Jesus looked to the consummation of all things in the final vindication of God and his saints . . . Jesus' belief in the final consummation of God's purpose is never in question: that is presupposed, whatever other expectation he did or did not entertain.'<sup>14</sup>

There would appear, however, to be some ambiguity on this point in Dr G. B. Caird's discussion of eschatology in his recent commentary on the Revelation of St John. On the one hand, he explicitly recognizes the reality of the End as a future event and as a future hope both for the author of the Apocalypse and for himself: John's use of eschatological language, he says, 'is an assertion that history has an end and therefore a meaning'; and again, 'The disappearance of the sea is proof that the transformation he is about to describe is in John's mind a real future. . . . History must have a real end,

<sup>12</sup> O. C. Quick, *The Gospel of the New World* (1944), pp. 70ff.

<sup>13</sup> J. A. T. Robinson, *Jesus and His Coming* (1957), p. 94.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36ff.

temporally as well as teleologically. Yet there are constituents of his vision which are hard to explain if this is all he has in mind. . . . The answer . . . is that this is a future which interpenetrates and informs the present.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, Dr Caird's proper reluctance to speak of the future without reference to the present appears (at least at one point) to develop into a desire to represent eschatology as an interpretation of the present with little or no reference to the future: 'Could it be,' he asks, 'that no ancient writer (except perhaps the imitative pedants responsible for some of the pseudepigraphical literature) ever used eschatological imagery except to express his confidence that God was working out his purpose in the events of contemporary history? Dodd has coined the phrase "realized eschatology" to explain certain aspects of the teaching of Jesus, and has been criticized for producing a paradox amounting even to a contradiction in terms. Is it possible that "realized eschatology" is instead a tautology, because only literalists ever used eschatological language for any other purpose than to give a theological interpretation to the critical moment that is called Today?'<sup>16</sup> If 'realized eschatology' is merely a tautology, then there is no future to interpenetrate and inform the present, no criterion by which to judge it, and no consummation to make it tolerable. When it loses its anchorage in expectant faith, faith in an End of which the mythology is taken not literally but *seriously*, eschatological language becomes merely evaluative, a metaphorical way of talking, pointing (for as long as it is able to retain its vitality) to theological importance without historical purpose, or (if this be conceivable) divine purpose without consummation. The revival of the insight of an older generation of scholars that the prophets used eschatological language to interpret the purpose of God in contemporary and on-going history is much to be welcomed, but their message is emasculated if we deny them their confident hope in the coming of the Kingdom. 'Although,' writes Canon David Jenkins in his third Bampton Lecture, 'this faith about a God active in history does not involve a truth *statement*, it is exceedingly important to notice that it does involve a truth *claim*. The Jewish faith in any form which is continuous with the internal logical structure developed in, and reflected in, the Old Testament is not to be understood as just an attitude to the world. It is an attitude to the world which has, as an integral

<sup>15</sup> G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St John the Divine* (1966), pp. 292, 262f.; see also pp. 284, 299f.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236; cf. p. 210.

feature of its structure, the claim that it is an attitude validly based on, and corresponding to, that reality which is both perceivable in the historical realities of this world, and also the reality which extends beyond, and ultimately determines, the realities of this world. The God whom the Jew faithfully knows and whose activity the Jew faithfully perceives is the true and living God, and therefore his Kingdom *will* come.<sup>17</sup>

#### IV

The form in which Jesus and his first interpreters encountered the eschatological hope of Israel comprised the Hebrew Scriptures plus the interpretation and elaboration of the inter-testamental period. From this bewildering complexity, two key concepts may be selected for comment: 'Kingdom of God' and 'Messiah'.

It is now generally agreed that 'Kingdom of God' in the teaching of Jesus<sup>18</sup> was adopted and adapted from contemporary Jewish apocalyptic expectation, in which the expression meant, first, the coming decisive intervention of God in history to destroy his enemies and vindicate his people. Thus, in the Qumran War Scroll we have:

'And to the God of Israel shall be the Kingdom,  
and among his people will he display might'  
(I QM 6.6),

alongside which we may set the familiar Kaddish prayer: 'Magnified and sanctified be his great name in the world which he has created according to his will. May he establish his kingdom in your lifetime and in your days and in the lifetime of all the house of Israel ever speedily and at a near time.' Secondly, 'Kingdom of God' is used to describe (as in the Beatitudes) the final state of blessedness which is established by God's sovereign intervention; thus, we read in the Sybilline Oracles: 'And then indeed he will raise up his Kingdom for all ages over men, he who once gave a holy law to godly men, to all of whom he promised to open out the earth and the world, and the portals of the blessed, and all joys, and everlasting sense and eternal gladness' (3.767-71).

The radical re-interpretation of 'Kingdom of God' in the teaching of Jesus falls outside the scope of this paper, but it is relevant to our limited purpose to observe that what is normative in the gospels is

<sup>17</sup> D. E. Jenkins, *The Glory of Man* (1967), pp. 28f.

<sup>18</sup> Norman Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (1963), pp. 158-185.



rare in the apocalyptic literature.<sup>19</sup> The apocalyptic writers use 'Kingdom of God' comparatively infrequently and prefer such expressions as 'the days of consummation' and 'the end of the days'. For these Jesus substituted his central term, as also he omitted the exuberant mythology and cunning devices with which they were associated. When we speak, therefore, of Israel as the matrix of Jesus, we must at once acknowledge that what it provided was re-shaped by a powerful and creative mind. It was, moreover, a mind which was able to penetrate behind the interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures which was then current and find (as Dr Robinson and Dr Perrin have pointed out) that it had far more in common with the prophets than with the apocalyptic writers.<sup>20</sup>

The second concept, 'Messiah', after dominating for centuries the Christian understanding of *praeparatio evangelica*, has decisively been put in its place by modern biblical scholarship. The difficulty about the traditional understanding of Messianism is twofold. First, it presupposed that belief in the coming of the Lord's Anointed was central to the faith of the Old Testament; and, second, it presupposed that Jesus himself accepted this expectation and in fact fulfilled it. Neither of these beliefs is soundly based. On the first issue, most scholars would now agree that some of the Old Testament texts traditionally interpreted as messianic prophecies offer no more than words which are capable of being contorted to predict the coming of Christ (for example, Genesis 3.15: 'God announces in the Garden of Eden that the seed of woman shall bruise the serpent's head').<sup>21</sup> Other supposed messianic prophecies, like Psalm 2, which is regrettably appointed for Anglican use on Easter Day, are now seen not to predict the coming of the Messianic King, but to celebrate the actual anointing and enthronement of a new king of David's dynasty in pre-exilic Jerusalem. This historical interpretation explains, even if it does not excuse, the promise of Psalm 2 that the Lord's Anointed would 'bruise the heathen with a rod of iron and break them in pieces like a potter's vessel'. Such naked military imperialism cannot be spiritualized and to use it as a model for the understanding of the One who exercised his kingly rule from a Cross is not only manifestly mistaken but positively blasphemous.

The source of these sentiments was, of course, the ideology of the

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 184f.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 177f.; J. A. T. Robinson, *Jesus and His Coming* (1957), pp. 94-97.

<sup>21</sup> S. Mowinckel (trans. G. W. Anderson), *He That Cometh* (1956), pp. 11-15.

great empires of the Ancient Near East,<sup>22</sup> particularly as it was focussed in their sacral conception of kingship, and they were introduced to Israel, as the royal psalms bear witness, during its brief and unhappy experiment with monarchy. The political theology which established itself in Jerusalem during the four centuries when the house of David ruled was the seed-bed of later Messianism, although it never became normative in the Old Testament period and, indeed, was explicitly rejected by Mosaic and Prophetic Yahwism. After the collapse of the Davidic monarchy, there were those who still yearned for the coming of a kind of religio-political Makarios, a Son of David, who (under God, of course) would restore Israel to a splendour and superiority among the nations which it was easy to forget this obscure people had never actually enjoyed. And so the Davidic hope established itself on the periphery of authentically prophetic expectation, of which it was no more than a nationalistic caricature. In this way the Messianic hope emerged and, in emerging, transmitted to late Judaism and ultimately to Christianity a legacy of religious despotism of which the church historian has no reason to be proud.

By the century before the birth of Jesus, the Messianic hope had become a conviction held with fanatical zeal by the Pharisees and through their influence by the mass of the people.<sup>23</sup> What it embraced is admirably illustrated by the Psalms of Solomon, which were written in the middle of the first century BC after the upstart monarchy of the Hasmoneans had been removed by the Roman Pompey. Now, the writer was convinced, was the very time for the triumphant coming of Israel's Messiah, for the restoration to the throne of an anointed king of the true Davidic line:

'Behold, O Lord, and raise up for them their king, the  
Son of David . . .

And gird him with strength to shatter unrighteous rulers,  
And to purge Jerusalem from Gentiles that trample her  
down to destruction . . .

Happy are they that shall be born in those days,  
To see the good fortune of Israel which God will bring  
to pass . . . ' (Ps. Sol. 17).

At least some of the first Christian disciples believed that they had indeed been born in those days, for they boldly identified their Master with the Messiah of popular expectation. With tragic clarity,

<sup>22</sup> See 'The Hymn of Victory of Thutmose III', in J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 373f.

<sup>23</sup> T. W. Manson, *The Servant-Messiah* (1953), pp. 1-35; 55-59.



tion for which the teaching of the Old Testament may be said to have prepared men's minds. The 'new thing' of the New Testament is, rather, the climax of a whole series of new things at work within the total historical life of Israel and to which 'in divers parts and divers manners' what we call the Old Testament bears witness.

This qualification – 'what we call the Old Testament' – is necessary, because the familiar label seriously obscures its significance – and in two main ways. First, it represents the scriptures of Israel as comprising a canon of religious literature which is unified and doctrinally authoritative; and second, it fails to illuminate the novelty – the newness and recurrent renewal – of Israel in its historical pilgrimage as the people of God. To represent the scriptures of Israel as the canon of the Mosaic Covenant is inevitably to regard it as a closed book; as such, it belongs to the Judaism which created it and which (as Josephus makes clear) contrasted its unity and authority with the 'divergent and contradictory' books of the Gentiles.<sup>26</sup> To the Old Testament *as a canon of holy scripture* the Christian has no legitimate entry; he can only force his way in by adopting pre-critical methods of exegesis. On the other hand, Israel's scriptures read as a unique historical witness to the unique historical dealings of God with his people, so far from being a book closed to the Christian, is not a book at all; it is, rather, an unfinished record of a theological pilgrimage. The record is not only unfinished but also highly diverse – a complex accumulation of pilgrim traditions constantly (as von Rad has so brilliantly demonstrated) in the process of reinterpretation in the light of Israel's new historical experience, in which by faith she found herself confronted by the sovereign purpose of God, whether in judgement or in restoration. In retaining the Hebrew Scriptures, the church recognized the inseparable connexion between Israelite and Christian faith, but by adopting the Jewish definition of them as the *canon* of the Mosaic covenant and calling it, in a crude attempt at reinterpretation, the *Old Testament*, it abandoned the key to their significance. It obscured, that is to say, the witness they bear to Israel's encounter in the totality of its historical existence with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Since it is hardly conceivable that we shall ever rid ourselves of the title 'Old Testament', it is necessary to speak paradoxically and say that it is actually in the Old Testament that the New Testament first appears. The new covenant, by which we mean God's creation of a people for his own

<sup>26</sup> R. J. H. Shutt, *Studies in Josephus* (1961), pp. 55-58.

intimate possession and universal purpose, is not merely forecast in the Old Testament, but is actually in evidence there – both in pattern and in process. ‘Jesus Christ is in the Old Testament,’ writes Professor Childs, ‘in the sense that “New Israel” is in the Old Testament. Whenever Israel responded in faith, the new existence, which is Jesus Christ, was taking tangible shape.’<sup>27</sup> It is for this reason that the Bible is a unity and the Hebrew Scriptures an integral part of the Christian heritage.

It cannot, of course, be claimed that all parts of the Hebrew Scriptures are equally valuable in illuminating the pre-Christian pilgrimage of the people of God, but once we have grasped the essential key – God’s dealing with his people in and through the totality of their historical existence – the whole incredibly diverse record may be studied with profit and without recourse to the high-jinks of allegorical and comparably bogus methods of exegesis.<sup>28</sup> Much of this ancient literature will be found to illuminate the newness of God’s action only by the evidence it affords of Israel’s frequent attempts to frustrate it – for example, by its elaboration of religious institutions, which, through myth and ritual, sheltered the people from that historical and moral reality where God was encountered. But all this dragging and distortion, all this unwillingness of the ‘Old Israel’ to become the ‘New Israel’, is inseparable from the economy of a God who discloses his purpose, not through the unmediated communication of infallible truths or the blinding light of miraculous signs, but through the messiness of life as it is.

Seen, as it is now seen more clearly than ever before, in the context of the sacral culture of the Ancient Near East, the life of Israel emerges as being from its very beginning a ‘new thing’ without precedent or parallel. The newness of the Old Testament has plausibility as a valid theological judgement because it is so patently a historical fact. Here was a people making the gamble of faith in a decisive breakaway from all the securities of the current religious understanding of existence, with its divinely-ordained sanctuaries and its divinely-ordained priesthoods, its mythological assurances and its infallibly effective rites and ceremonies. As von Rad has reminded us, ‘This sacred understanding of the world is essentially non-historical.’<sup>29</sup> Israel dared to trust God as he was encountered

<sup>27</sup> B. S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (1960), pp. 104f.

<sup>28</sup> James Barr, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-148.

<sup>29</sup> G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (trans. D. M. G. Stalker), vol. 2 (1965), p. 111; cf. p. 108.

in the secular world of men and nations, where by definition there can be no certainty and no resting place. Whether this was God's way of abolishing religion, or of effecting a radical reinterpretation of it, is largely a question of definition. With Israel, at least, a 'new thing' came into existence, of which, as far as one can judge, religion proper does not stand in need: this 'new thing' is best called responsive faith.

It was by responsive faith that Israel was enabled to find God in present experience, remaining expectant and prepared to move. It was by responsive faith that Israel's prophets had the courage to adopt as their criteria of God's will the moral convictions of secular humanism as taught in the Wisdom Schools of the Ancient Near East and on this basis discern God's judgement in their people's tragic history. It was by the same responsive faith that the prophets were enabled to look beyond judgement for the creation of a 'New Israel' open to God's purpose. Despite the familiar claim of the text books, there was never any such thing as 'prophetic religion', since religion must offer a minimum of stable practice and reliable programme. For the prophets, nothing in the last analysis (and it was their greatness always to follow through their insight to the last analysis) was stable and reliable, except the sovereign purpose of God himself. This was disclosed to faith in his historical dealings with Israel, but it never found fulfilment in Israel's historical existence. That is why the traditions of God's dealing with his people were never accepted by the prophets as the charter of any established and secure relationship, but employed primarily as models for the interpretation of new and unprecedented experience. The 'former things' had constantly to be reinterpreted, in order that Israel should perceive the 'new thing' springing forth in the course of her pilgrimage. In prophetic teaching, tradition was never a parking place but always a signpost, pointing, for example, to a *New Covenant* and a *Second Exodus*. It is in this sense that the Old Testament is open-ended.

It cannot be proved that the end to which the prophetic faith of the Old Testament remained open was actually realized in the person of Jesus. This is not surprising, since Christian faith remains *faith* and nothing of significance for faith can be *proved*. But it can be demonstrated that what the New Testament proposes for our acceptance is entirely congruous with Israel's conception of her pilgrimage in history. The apostolic witnesses present the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as the culmination of that pilgrimage. Underlying their sometimes rhetorical and (from our point of view)

arbitrary re-application of Old Testament texts, the writers of the New Testament reveal an impressive awareness that the ancient scriptures bear witness to a real historical process – a process in which they discerned with Israel's prophets the sovereign purpose of God to fashion a people responsive to his design for his creatures. In Jesus, through life, death and resurrection, they proclaimed that God had brought this sovereign purpose to fulfilment; in his person was embodied the responsive people, the 'Son of Man',<sup>30</sup> and, therefore, Israel's pilgrimage, now entered upon its final phase, was henceforth inseparable from him.

The pilgrimage of the people of God is inseparable from Jesus whether we look to the past or to the future. Looking to the past, it might be said that the Old Testament is unintelligible apart from the key which the New Testament supplies; perhaps it would be more accurate to say that without that key it is hardly credible. You do not need to be a Christian to uncover Israel's centuries' long quest for 'a new thing'; it is open to anybody who will inspect the evidence. What, apart from the Gospel, is not at all obvious is the possibility of believing that this endless quest was prompted by a sovereign and loving God. On the other hand, it might be said that while the person of Jesus is entirely *credible* apart from the Old Testament, his significance is hardly intelligible in isolation from its witness to the newness of God's way with Israel. The two Testaments need each other and we need both.

Equally the pilgrimage of the people of God is inseparable from Jesus when we look to the future. The climax which the Gospel proclaims did not put an end to pilgrimage and ensconce Christians in some inviolable sanctuary, because the climax was not a miraculous supersession of this age by the Age to Come; it was not the *eschaton* of apocalyptic expectation, at once unmistakable, universal and chronologically final; in the event, the climax was a person – *eschatos* not *eschaton*. In him, we believe, God's sovereign purpose was wholly realized in human history, but realized through the willing acceptance of rejection. Human history, with all its ambiguities in relation to God's purpose, still continues and so does the pilgrimage of his people, but it continues with the light and power of Jesus as the *eschatos*, with a new discernment of its goal and a new possibility of responding on the way.

<sup>30</sup> C. F. D. Moule, *op. cit.*, pp. 34ff.

## JESUS IN THE GOSPELS

*Dennis Nineham*

ANYONE FAMILIAR with the great variety and complexity of the topics my title could reasonably be expected to cover will, I hope, be sympathetic if I confess at the outset that my treatment of them will be highly selective and only rather loosely connected. In a discussion limited to a single lecture it could hardly be otherwise; but I should like to emphasize the point because the subject is one of vital religious concern to Christians, and it is only too easy for even the most selective treatment to be mistaken for a comprehensive one and for unavoidable omissions to be construed as implicit denials, with the result that the lecturer's overall position gets seriously misunderstood.

That said, a useful starting point may be the position of this lecture in the programme of the conference. It has been preceded by a lecture on pre-Christian Jewish expectations. One strand in Jewish religion in the period immediately before the Christian era was highly eschatological. It is true that the vivid expectations of a great change to come were largely based on the character, power and plans of Yahweh as these were believed to have been revealed in certain events of Israel's history, and so there was a basis for a genuine engagement with the past; nevertheless this was essentially a religion of expectation. The thrust was forward, the emphasis on the future.

It is clear that early Christianity owed much to this strand in Judaism. The New Testament is full of eschatological, not to say apocalyptic, expectations of a basically Jewish kind, most of them expressed in conventional Jewish imagery. On the other hand, as the following two lectures will make clear, there was an important backward-looking element in primitive Christianity. A good deal of the early Christians' attention was directed to the past in an attempt to know and understand better certain events which had occurred comparatively recently. These events were believed to have revolutionized the religious situation, to have made possible a new



relationship with God in the here and now, to have made more certain, and perhaps more imminent, the coming of the *parousia*, if indeed they had not actually inaugurated it, and to necessitate radical re-thinking about what it would be like when it did come in its completeness, and about how men could then hope to be vindicated before God.

However sceptical we may be as historians, and however much we may be prepared to attribute to the creativity of the earliest Christians, clearly *something* must have happened to account for the rise of this new religious movement which, for all its Jewish colouring, was markedly, and increasingly, distinct from Judaism. The New Testament writers claim that the events which gave rise to their movement centred on the career and teaching of one Jesus, who lived in Palestine in the earlier part of what we call the first century AD. I shall not devote any time to defending the essential truth of this claim because I do not believe it needs defence. I know of course that some very acute Marxist scholars still champion the Christ-myth position, and as a matter of fact some of the points they bring forward are more significant, or at any rate interesting, than is sometimes recognized. Nevertheless, the Christ-myth position seems to me so near to being a curiosity of scholarship that it would not be appropriate to spend time deploying the arguments against it in a brief discussion such as this. Let us assume that Jesus was a fully historical person and that Christianity took its origin from certain events in, or centring on, his career. What more can we say about him? The New Testament writers were content for the most part simply to presuppose the events of his life. It is only the Evangelists who attempted any extended or connected account of them; and their accounts were confessedly highly selective, the aim of the selection being to give prominence to those elements in the story which were of greatest importance for the new religious situation which had emerged. Moreover they tried to arrange and present the material they selected in such a way as to bring out what they believed to be its correct religious interpretation.

The first major question I want to raise is what we should do with these accounts, or pictures, the Evangelists give; and my answer briefly is: begin by taking them with all possible seriousness and studying them carefully exactly as they stand. It would be a perfectly legitimate interpretation of my title *Jesus in the Gospels* if I were to devote the rest of my lecture not to raising historical questions of any sort but simply to exploring with you the picture of Jesus we

find in the Gospels as they stand. Indeed to do that would be in line with an important trend in contemporary New Testament scholarship. In the past, at any rate since the rise of critical scholarship, professional students of the Gospels have tended to be obsessed with historical questions and to treat the contents of the Gospels simply as the means to their own historical ends. They have often tried to shoulder the Evangelists and their pictures out of the way in order to get at the Jesus of history. They have been ready, as Dr Austin Farrer puts it, to break up the mosaic of Mark or Matthew or Luke, as the case may be, in the hope of putting the pieces together again in what they believed would be a more historically accurate pattern of their own construction.

But recently the mood has changed. Most scholars are now quite clear that before we lay violent hands on the mosaics of the Evangelists, for whatever laudable purposes, we should study them carefully and sensitively as they stand and try to savour and appreciate them as fully as possible. Accordingly, modern Gospel scholars see their work as involving something comparable to the activity of the literary critic or the art critic. If any of you, for example, has heard Sir Kenneth Clarke expounding a great painting you will know how, by careful attention to the perspectives, relative proportions and tone contrasts, to the details and omissions and so on, and by comparison of the picture in question with other appropriate canvases, he can bring out a whole range of significances and nuances which we should not have noticed for ourselves, but which, once they have been pointed out to us, greatly enhance our appreciation of the picture.

In a somewhat similar way many Gospel scholars today try to explore sensitively the pictures of Jesus in the Gospels. Comparing one with another, noting in each case the exact arrangement of the material, the relative proportions, the omissions and the emphases and so on, they attempt to appreciate each Evangelist's picture fully, and let it convey to the full *its* impression of the character of the events it portrays and of their meaning for the Christian faith and life. For, as I say, it is now recognized that it was with such practical, theological and edificatory aims that each Evangelist selected, arranged and presented his material.

So far as I can discover, this way of approach to the Gospels was discovered, or rediscovered, mainly by English-speaking scholars such as F. C. Burkitt, H. J. Cadbury, J. H. Ropes and R. H. Lightfoot; but it has now been taken up with characteristic thorough-

ness in Germany, where *Sachkritik*, as it is called, is now in full swing and even has its philosophical and literary apologist in the person of Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Already there have been valuable results. Most people know of the light thrown on Mark's Gospel by R. H. Lightfoot and others; and to take a more recent example, the work on Luke-Acts done along these lines by such scholars as Conzelmann, Haenchen and C. K. Barrett has revealed important and distinctive traits of the specifically Lucan portrait which had hitherto escaped notice. It has shown grounds for thinking that Luke was dissatisfied with earlier understandings of the relation of Jesus' ministry to the *parousia* and sought to supersede them by an understanding more in line with the way history was in fact developing.

All this is clearly to the good and I strongly urge you, especially if your work includes preaching, to read the works of such scholars and under their guidance to explore as deeply and sensitively as you can the specific pictures of Jesus conveyed by the various Evangelists. Make yourself thoroughly familiar with what each Evangelist says and does not say, with his order of events and the phrases he uses and avoids; and try to see what all this means in terms of the total impression he conveys. Begin at the beginning; read Mark, learn and inwardly digest him until the outlines, proportions and details of the specifically Marcan Christ are thoroughly clear to you, and then do the same with the other Evangelists. Even if the Evangelists were historically less sophisticated, or even less well informed, than we are, they were directly familiar with many of the assumptions, habits and thought-forms of those they were describing in a way that we can never be, and in that important respect if in no other, their portraits are bound to remain superior to anything we can ever hope to produce. Religiously, there is everything to be learned from these pictures, but even from the historian's point of view, it is surely good sense to appreciate our sources as fully as possible before we begin to use them for purposes of historical reconstruction.

I have only two comments to add. The first concerns the danger of over-subtlety, which the modern Gospel scholar shares with every literary and art critic. For all the undoubted excellence of the work on Luke-Acts I referred to just now, it is difficult when reading some of it to resist the conclusion that significance is being suggested for details in which only fancy could really find any; and it is often salutary to compare this work with the work on the

same books done in the nineteen-twenties by Professor H. J. Cadbury, a scholar with a healthy suspicion of such over-subtlety. The risk of over-subtlety in my opinion is one which is well worth running, but it remains real none the less.

My second comment is this: in studying the pictures conveyed by the Gospels, it is important to keep in mind the essentially *narrative* character of the Gospel type of writing. Dr W. B. Gallie in a recent book<sup>1</sup> has drawn attention to the strange way in which philosophers of history have tended to ignore the significance of the essentially narrative character of most historical documents; and in a forthcoming book Dr Hans Frei of Yale will be making the same point in regard to the Gospels and seeking to remedy the defect so far as the study of Luke is concerned. Hitherto, studies of the kind I have been describing have tended to treat the Gospel pictures simply as a collection of statuesque poses, and that is clearly to miss something.<sup>2</sup>

However, this new approach to the Gospels, for all its value, is not sufficient by itself. The demands of modern scientific history and the character of the Gospels themselves, with the many *prima facie* incompatibilities between the pictures they present, alike demand that we raise historical questions. We have to attempt some move from the *Jesus in the Gospels* to the *Jesus behind the Gospels*. In a group such as this I imagine that hardly needs arguing; nor is it necessary to say very much about the method by which such a move has to be attempted.

Modern critical historical method was to a considerable extent forged to deal with the problems raised by the Gospels and other biblical books, and by now it is pretty fully understood, though it is constantly being refined. The application of it to books like the Gospels, which claim to report events of a unique kind, certainly raises special problems, but essentially, so far as I can see, the method remains applicable. I have tried to discuss some of the problems connected with its application to the Gospels in a recently published lecture,<sup>3</sup> and of what I said there I shall only repeat here

<sup>1</sup> *Philosophy and Historical Understanding*, 1964.

<sup>2</sup> It was interesting at the conference to hear Dr Dillistone make a similar point quite independently. See below pp. 92f. (Needless to say, the point is quite unaffected by the question whether the narrative sequences in the Gospels are historically authentic or not.)

<sup>3</sup> The Gore Memorial Lecture for 1966, 'History and the Gospel', which appeared in *The London Quarterly and Holborn Review* for April 1967, and is now available as a separate booklet.

certain points which seem to me specially liable to misunderstanding on the part of New Testament students.

The modern historian's procedure depends on a refusal to treat any sources, whether written or otherwise, as more than primary data, data which have to be rigorously criticized and cross-examined, compared and contrasted with other data – 'tortured' as Collingwood put it – before anything they contain or suggest can be used as the basis for an historical account which deserves that name. When the historian has 'tortured' his data in this way he uses the results as the basis for a reconstruction of the events. He may call this process 'establishing the facts'; but he is the first to recognize that the facts as he establishes them are quite distinct from the original events, and, unlike them, are liable to modification and revision. Quite apart from the possibility that further data may come to light, the historian knows how much depends on the questions with which he has approached his evidence; and he recognizes that future historians, asking further and possibly more adequate questions, are virtually certain to want to revise his reconstruction, at any rate in certain particulars. That of course is not to condemn the historian's work to pure relativism; it is highly unlikely that certain basic facts about, for example, the battle of Waterloo will ever need serious revision. Nevertheless, it clearly does have certain important consequences for our subject.

First, it means that a thoroughly critical, even an initially sceptical, approach to the Evangelists' pictures of Jesus is not a sign of an unnecessarily sceptical or radical scholar, but just part of the application of a genuinely historical procedure.

Secondly, it means that however thoroughly or soberly a historian of the Gospel events may have done his work, his conclusions must be regarded as tentative, and are virtually certain to need revision in greater or less degree as time goes on. The repeated use of the phrase 'assured results' has often – though not always – revealed an insufficient grasp of historical method on the part of New Testament theologians.

Third, and perhaps least understood, is this point. It often happens in historical investigations, as in police investigations, that there is not sufficient collateral evidence to provide a basis for the 'torturing' of the *prima facie* evidence. In such cases the historian, like the police, may 'have his suspicions' about what happened, but he must be careful not to claim too much for them or allow them to be confused with a fully historical verdict. Gospel stories, which seldom

have any extra-biblical confirmation, and often rest in the last resort on a single strand of tradition, frequently give rise to this sort of situation; and where they do, it is most important that we should fully recognize the fact and not claim for them the sort of historical certainty which rests on full critical sifting of data.

Christians naturally want to know where they stand with regard to the earthly life of their master, and some suspicion that those who apply historical methods to the Gospels are doing it with unnecessary rigour and scepticism is understandable enough. But such suspicion is perhaps increased by reason of the contrast which can be drawn between many of those engaged on this work today and certain earlier scholars whose works are widely familiar. When critical historical methods began to be applied to the story of Jesus in earnest some two hundred years ago, the results at first seemed devastating; and in the comparatively limited circle of people involved considerable scepticism, or at any rate agnosticism, prevailed with regard to the Gospel picture. However, in the course of time, as the circle of those involved in the investigations widened, the mood changed and became more optimistic; and in the latter part of the last century many highly qualified and widely known scholars came to feel that the Gospels afforded an ample basis for tracing the outward course of the Lord's life, or at any rate of the later part of it, and also the inner spiritual development which informed and controlled it. Towards the end of the century, Heinrich Weinel could claim: 'We know Jesus right well.' It was felt possible to write lives of Jesus, often on a considerable scale, and, as you will know, such lives poured from the presses of this country, and especially Germany, in very considerable numbers.

However, about the turn of the century the mood changed again, partly as the result of the appearance of two books, Schweitzer's famous *Quest of the Historical Jesus* and a similar, but less well known work by Heinrich Weinel.<sup>4</sup> As these two writers described and reviewed a selection of the innumerable lives of Jesus it became clear that there were astonishingly wide divergences between the reconstructions put forward in them, and also that a fairly close correlation could be observed between a particular writer's picture and his general views on social and religious questions.

What is more, subsequent Gospel research has revealed the reasons for these divergences and shown that they were due not to arbitrary

<sup>4</sup> *Jesus in the Nineteenth Century and After* (ET by Weinel and Widgery).

aberrations on the part of individual scholars, but to certain essential characteristics of the Gospels themselves and the material on which they were based. The reasons which led the Evangelists, and their predecessors in the period of oral transmission, to preserve the material, and the public contexts in which for the most part they did so, were of a practical religious kind which afforded no motive for preserving chronological, psychological and other biographical data such as are indispensable for writing any life. In the absence of such data from the records the biographer could only supply them from his own experience; and so, as his experience differed from that of another, so did his picture of Jesus. As Father Tyrrell put it *a propos* of one such writer: 'The Christ he sees looking back through nineteen centuries of Catholic darkness, is only the reflection of a Liberal Protestant face, seen at the bottom of a deep well.'<sup>5</sup> To a considerable extent each biographer had been making the so-called Jesus of History after his own image – a very serious matter when, as often, he then proceeded to pattern his own life and piety on this supposedly 'historical' Jesus.

It is difficult to see how this particular change of outlook can ever be more than very partially reversed. If *anything* in this field deserves to be called an 'assured conclusion' it is surely the impossibility of writing a life or biography of Jesus as the word biography is now generally understood.<sup>6</sup> Small wonder that there followed a period of deep agnosticism with regard to the figure of Jesus and of acute pessimism about the possibility of our ever knowing anything substantial about him. In 1926 appeared Bultmann's very negative book *Jesus* (though it is by no means as completely negative as is sometimes suggested) and 1935 saw the publication of R. H. Lightfoot's Bampton Lectures for 1934, with their famous concluding paragraph to the effect that: 'the form of the earthly no less than of the heavenly Christ is for the most part hidden from us. For all the inestimable value of the Gospels, they yield us little more than a whisper of his voice; we have in them but the out-skirts of his ways.' This again is less extreme than has often been supposed, if the

<sup>5</sup> *Christianity at the Crossroads*, p. 44. The writer under discussion is Harnack.

<sup>6</sup> On these grounds, if no others, I should want to dissociate myself from Canon Montefiore's speculations about the sexual attitudes of Jesus (see pp. 108f). As I understand the matter, the Gospels simply do not provide the type of data for settling such questions, and speculation about them is therefore unlikely to prove fruitful. As I wrote in my commentary on *St Mark* about the Evangelists' account of Jesus: 'They do not even think to tell us definitely whether or not he was married!' (p. 35).

allusion to the book of Job is allowed for; but even so it was daunting enough.

Although, as I say, insights were achieved in this period which seem likely to prove permanently valid, it is also probably true that the scholars of this time exaggerated somewhat the conclusions to be drawn from what they had discovered, or perhaps I should say misconstrued them. It is one thing to say that you cannot write a life of a person; quite another to suggest that you cannot know anything about him.

After all, much of the material in the nineteenth-century lives of Jesus was of comparatively little *religious* interest or significance; and, what is more important, it was precisely this material, of relatively little religious significance, which was now seen to have been most completely without objective basis. The Evangelists and their predecessors were not on the whole interested in such purely biographical matters, and so proved poor guides to modern scholars in their attempts to satisfy their curiosity about them. But when we turn to the *religious* character and implications of Jesus and his teaching, the case is very different. The Evangelists may often have got these wrong, but at least they were passionately interested in them; indeed they preserved the material they did precisely in the attempt to pass on the truth about them. Accordingly, so far as these religious aspects of the story of Jesus are concerned, the Gospels constitute, at least *prima facie*, a source of accurate information, however critically they may have to be handled in the process of extracting it.

All this had already been suggested implicitly by Professor C. H. Dodd before the war, and then in 1953 a lecture along these lines by Professor Ernst Käsemann at Jugenheim<sup>7</sup> was the proximate cause which inaugurated yet another era in the historical study of the life of Jesus. In the period since then a positive ferment of discussion has been provoked, especially among former pupils of Bultmann, and a large number of books and articles has appeared on both sides of the Atlantic. Although those involved have been by no means confined to the Bultmannian school, and a wide variety of views has been expressed, a movement of thought has emerged with sufficient homogeneity to be designated by a single name, and it is generally known in this country by the description suggested by

<sup>7</sup> Now published in English as the first item in his *Essays on New Testament Themes*, London 1964.



James M. Robinson, 'the new quest of the historical Jesus'. It has aroused so much interest and exerted so much influence that it is worthwhile to try to understand and appraise it correctly.

In the nature of the case, any generalized statements about the views of so disparate a group of scholars are liable to be misleading, but perhaps the following may still be worth saying. The scholars in this group all endorse wholeheartedly the views of their predecessors about the impossibility of ever writing a life of Jesus; but they believe, nevertheless, that it may be possible to learn a certain amount about him; in fact to know exactly the sort of thing we want to know as Christians. It is sometimes suggested that this new appreciation of the situation depends on a new understanding of the general nature of historical study derived from Wilhelm Dilthey and his school. There may be truth in that, though I am persuaded by Mr D. E. H. Whiteley, Dr T. A. Roberts<sup>8</sup> and others that it is something of an exaggeration; and in any case the essential point can be put fairly simply: you may not have information about some historical personage of the sort that will enable you to trace the development of his life either outer or inner, and yet on the basis of certain isolated things he is known to have said and done, if they are sufficiently characteristic and revealing, you may be able to discover a great deal about his attitude to life, about his attitude to God and the world, about his understanding of himself and his work, and about the claims he made on others and the attitudes he expected from them and adopted towards them.

It is a suggestion of this sort the scholars I am describing make with regard to Jesus; and they back it up by pointing out that it was precisely such characteristic and revealing – *religiously* revealing – acts and sayings of Jesus that the Evangelists were concerned to preserve.

With this suggestion in mind these scholars have subjected the Gospel texts to the most rigorous critical examination, setting on one side any passages which seem even remotely likely to have been invented or overlaid by the faith of the post-resurrection Church, and so isolating what they take to be a number of authentic sayings and actions of Jesus himself. The criteria for deciding what is authentic can never be foolproof, but these scholars are encouraged by the fact that the material they tentatively assign to the historical Jesus, though it comes from various strata in the tradition, seems to yield a figure of remarkably life-like consistency.

<sup>8</sup> See *Journal of Theological Studies*, 1962, p. 392, and *Religious Studies*, 1966, pp. 186ff.

Thus, it is suggested, though we cannot know what Jesus looked like, nor trace the course of his journeys or the development of his character, we can know the essential religious impact he made, and intended to make. And in the light of this knowledge, we can be sure that though he was in some ways very different from the figure pictured in the finished Gospels or the creeds, he was yet such that these later pictures were, for their respective periods, more or less fair comment upon him.

These scholars insist that Jesus and his preaching, the person and the message, the words and the actions must be seen as an indivisible unity. That is not to say that Jesus made any messianic claims for himself, whether as Son of God, Son of Man or Messiah. He did not. He probably appeared to his contemporaries, and to himself, as a prophet or rabbi. But whereas prophets normally appealed to the authority of some vision or revelation, and rabbis to the authority of the Law, Jesus claimed that his words and deeds were directly backed and informed by the authority of God himself, and it was for this reason that he could demand faith in them. This authority, or directness, was one of the things most vividly remembered about Jesus. 'What is this?' people exclaimed, 'A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.'<sup>9</sup> Even when he was directly challenging the sacred authority of the Law, Jesus said simply: 'but I say to you'; and again and again in the tradition we hear his words: 'Truly I say to you.' In these words, according to the claim of Hans Schlier, the whole of subsequent christology is contained *in nuce*.<sup>10</sup> Thus Günther Bornkamm writes that 'directness . . . is part of the picture of the historical Jesus right from the beginning'<sup>11</sup> and he says: 'To make the reality of God present: this is the essential mystery of Jesus.'<sup>12</sup> And Ernst Fuchs claims that 'Jesus' conduct is neither that of a prophet nor of a teacher of wisdom, but that of a man who dares to act in God's stead.'<sup>13</sup>

If we ask about the source of Jesus' directness, it is connected with his proclamation of the Kingdom of God. Jesus brought the promise of the kingdom, a promise based on no external authority. God was coming to all who were in need of him, particularly to those who had traditionally been excluded from his salvation and

<sup>9</sup> Mark 1.27.

<sup>10</sup> See his article on 'Amen' in G. Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.

<sup>11</sup> *Jesus of Nazareth*, p. 58.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>13</sup> *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, London, 1964, p. 22.

kingdom, the poor, the sick, the publicans and sinners, all those who did not by rights belong to it. These people need no longer run from God, for he would be their refuge. Jesus' call to repentance and offer of forgiveness were the dawn of God's kingdom.

Jesus is not himself the kingdom, but he announces the imminence of the kingdom and in virtue of that is in his own person the decisive factor in what has begun. There is a vital connection between salvation and Jesus' person because it is he who offers salvation to mankind, pronounces blessing on the poor and heals the sick. In his words and deeds the kingdom is already casting its shadow before it and is already secretly at work in the world.

Thus Jesus understood his proclamation and actions as God becoming immediate reality and action – hence his directness and authority. It follows that a man's relationship with God is bound up with his relationship to Jesus. In calling men to himself Jesus was calling them to God. To be one of Jesus' followers now, and to share in the future salvation are one and the same thing. A man has direct access to God when he is a follower of Jesus.

You will see now what I meant when I said that though, according to these scholars, Jesus did not claim to be Messiah, they feel the application of messianic categories to him, and the later expressions of the Church's faith in him, to have been substantially justified.<sup>14</sup>

If I am to have time for comment and appraisal, I must leave my account of the new quest there, inadequate though it has been. No doubt I have unduly sharpened the issue of principle between these scholars and their predecessors before the war, but, however exactly the issue should be posed, it will be clear, I hope, that my sympathies lie on the whole with the new position. On one point in particular it seems to me to be right: we are bound to posit something of this extraordinary kind in the consciousness of Jesus<sup>15</sup> if we are to account for the christological faith of the early church as opposed to the general eschatological expectations of first-century Judaism.

If now I turn to criticism it is with an acute awareness of having read only a fraction of the literature. But so far as I am familiar with it, the picture of Jesus which emerges strikes me as startlingly, and perhaps implausibly, modern. As you will know, most of the

<sup>14</sup> In the preceding paragraphs I have drawn heavily on Heinz Zahrnt's *The Historical Jesus*.

<sup>15</sup> See further on this the valuable fifth chapter of John Knox's *The Death of Christ*.

scholars in this group have been deeply influenced by the writings of Martin Heidegger, and the Jesus they present to us, with his refusal to make any metaphysical claims or to rely on any external attestation, and his demand for a sheerly existential decision of faith, seems a suspiciously modern, and indeed Heideggerian, figure.<sup>16</sup>

A week or two ago on the television, extracts were shown from Pasolini's obviously remarkable film of St Matthew's Gospel; even from those extracts it was clear how completely the Jesus of this very sensitive director was rooted in the culture and circumstances of his day. In the patterns of his thinking, in his methods of teaching and controversy, in his emotional stances and symbolic actions, in his very way of facing suffering, he was a first-century Palestinian among first-century Palestinians. And the questions and movements which met him on his travels and shaped the course of his activity were likewise essentially first century and Palestinian. Without necessarily accepting Pasolini's detailed interpretation, one can see that he is right on the general point. Pasolini is a Marxist and it has always been a contribution of Marxist scholars to keep us aware that the genuinely historical Jesus must have stood in a specific relationship to the culture and movements of his time and place, even where that relationship was one of at least relative transcendence over them.

By contrast, the Jesus of the new quest seems to some extent culturally rootless, or even to have his roots in the culture of twentieth-century Germany. It is not so much what these scholars include in their picture which worries me as what they leave out. Their Jesus seems lacking in a first-century dimension. No doubt I am oversharpening the issues again, but if I had to prophesy, I should say that the figure of Jesus will be increasingly rounded out by the addition of a first-century dimension and that in the process the picture will not only be enlarged but considerably modified, and that in ways which will not make it more immediately acceptable to twentieth-century Europeans.

Our knowledge of first-century Palestine is now considerable, and it is continually increasing. It is significant that a number of scholars, Oscar Cullmann and Professor S. G. F. Brandon for example, have recently been writing books on what we know of political and religious movements there and raising the question of Jesus' relation to them. Without necessarily accepting their answers one can see the propriety of their questions. The problem, of course, is whether the Gospels provide sufficient material to allow us to answer such

<sup>16</sup> See further pp. 61-63 below.

questions with anything approaching objectivity. That is a difficult question, but it is not immediately obvious that the answer is no. Once we have accepted the premiss of the new quest that there may be in the Gospels authentic incidents sufficiently numerous and characteristic to reveal Jesus to us, it becomes at least possible that there may be material which discloses aspects of him other than those so far dealt with by the new quest.

In this connexion a great deal depends on the criteria employed to decide which Gospel material is authentic, and here there is certainly room for discussion. For example one of the exponents of the new quest<sup>17</sup> writes on this matter: 'We can only feel ourselves to be on safe ground where a tradition cannot be derived from a Jewish environment.' If that means what it says, just consider the presupposition which lies behind it; it assumes that Jesus' message and ministry can have owed nothing to the Jewish culture and tradition by which he was surrounded.<sup>18</sup> But why should it be supposed that Jesus' ministry and teaching were novel in that sense, and is it likely that they were? It has been remarked that the desire to claim an exaggerated degree of originality for Jesus has long been a source of distortion in our picture of him.

The scholar who made this remark is the American veteran H. J. Cadbury. He has a number of salutary things to say on our topic and it is much to be deplored that his work, especially his two

<sup>17</sup> Heinz Zahrnt, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

<sup>18</sup> In the interests of fairness and accuracy, this point and some of those which follow need, not I hope correction, but fuller statement than they could receive in the lecture as delivered. The methodological question with which the scholars under discussion begin is unexceptionable enough, even if it is not perhaps as patient of a clear answer as they sometimes seem to suppose. They ask what elements in the tradition cannot *conceivably* be due to the invention or elaboration of the early Church; but then, recognizing that the passages so isolated were only a minimum starting point, they use the picture of Jesus which emerges from them as a basis for deciding on the probable authenticity of other Gospel passages. At the first stage in this process the employment of such criteria as that discussed in the text above may be more or less legitimate; what I question is whether at the second stage these scholars are not led, no doubt unwittingly, by their modern presuppositions to limit unduly the number of passages they use in constructing their final picture. If I may offer just one example: given the picture which, according to them, emerges at stage one, is it really purely *historical* considerations which lead them to deny that Jesus made messianic claims of any sort or based his authority upon them? On purely historical grounds, is it not likely that a first-century figure who made the sort of claims these scholars attribute to Jesus would have seen them as tantamount to messianic claims of some kind? For an allied form of criticism see now M. D. Hooker, *The Son of Man in Mark*, esp. pp. 4ff and pp. 79ff.

remarkable little paperbacks: *Jesus What Manner of Man?* and *The Peril of Modernizing Jesus* are so little read in this country. As we have seen, the modern historian is acutely aware of the importance of the questions with which we approach historical sources, and Dr Cadbury warns us that in virtue of the questions we put to the Gospels we are in continual, and perhaps inescapable, danger of illegitimately modernizing the picture of Jesus and unnecessarily limiting its dimensions. So many of our questions are based on purely modern assumptions. For example, we ask the undoubtedly important, and apparently innocent, question whether Jesus conceived his ministry as messianic, and how he saw it as related to the coming of the kingdom. Yet in posing the question we assume a number of things: that Jesus conceived of himself as *having* a ministry, that is to say that he set before himself a well-defined goal to his activities and had worked out a programme for realizing it; that he had a clear-cut conception of the messianic and that we can discover what it was; likewise that he had worked out a clear-cut conception of the kingdom and of the relation of his life's work to it. This last, in particular, has become almost axiomatic for such modern New Testament scholarship, and the parables are habitually interpreted in the light of it. But on the basis of an encyclopedic knowledge of first-century Judaism, and a most careful examination of the Gospel evidence, Dr Cadbury sees reason to doubt all three of these assumptions. For example, he writes: 'I am doubtful whether we do not read into Jesus' life more of a campaign than existed. . . . The sense of purpose, objective, etc. as necessary for every good life is more modern than we commonly imagine. Some men in antiquity lived under it, [but] . . . my impression is that Jesus was largely casual. He reacted to situations as they arose but probably he had hardly a programme at all. His martyrdom is not in conflict with such a view. . . .' 'Jesus . . . is likely to have lived much by custom and by unco-ordinated impulse and to have made conscious decisions only of a rather isolated and varied character. . . . Jesus was in this respect a child of his age.'<sup>19</sup> And again: 'Almost everything that Jesus said can be associated with the kingdom. But I must express my feeling that a term like that was so conventional and so inclusive that it would be a mistake to find the key to Jesus' interests by our own attempt to narrow the term down to some special implication of the term. . . . Whatever be its most probable or persistent meaning, it provides in the parables no centralizing

<sup>19</sup> *Peril*, pp. 140-142.

subject, but rather a convenient way of doing what we do when we say: "Life is like this." "Truth or duty may be illustrated by this." "Here is the way it seems to me."

Without claiming that Cadbury is wholly right about this, I should like to mention one or two other examples from his work. Although he was writing well over twenty years ago, he too examined the passages in the Gospels about the *exousia* (authority) of Jesus, but his conclusions were rather different from those I quoted earlier. So far as we can discern the original bearing of such terms, Cadbury thinks they referred to the influence Jesus exercised partly as the result of the remarkable miracles he could perform and partly as the result of the uncompromising ruggedness of his moral demands and the enthusiasm and self-assured confidence with which he made them.<sup>20</sup>

This is rather different from the unmediated divine authority pictured by Bornkamm and Fuchs, and the difference is even more sharply focussed if we consider Cadbury's discussion (in 1946, be it remembered) of the 'I' sayings in the Gospel. He doubts if Jesus did in fact claim acceptance for his teaching on the basis of his personal authority, or even whether he *directly* claimed the authority of God for what he said; rather, he suggests, Jesus may have worked out his teaching on the basis of commonsense reasoning, in principle possible to anyone, and then claimed it as the will of God because it seemed so self-evidently right. He writes: 'In spite of some passages in the Gospels. . . I think he expected his hearers to rely more on themselves than on himself. At least once he says this explicitly. . . "Why don't you judge *even of yourselves* what is right?" The evangelists with all their reverence for Jesus never represent him as saying, "Why do you not take it from me?"' The form of the 'I' sayings Cadbury attributes to the Evangelist and in the passage on the Law in Matthew 5 he thinks it is the teaching which is to be contrasted rather than the teacher. He concludes: 'These facts in the synoptic gospels and the contrasting egoism of the teaching of Jesus in the gospel of John are enough to make us look elsewhere for Jesus' concept of the basis of his pupils' response than in the authority of an *ipse dixit*.'<sup>21</sup>

In the books I have just quoted, Cadbury, like the scholars of the new quest, relies on a critical examination of the Gospel texts carried out with an eye almost morbidly open for distorting pre-

<sup>20</sup> See e.g. *Jesus*, pp. 71-72.

<sup>21</sup> The reference is to *Jesus*, pp. 93-94, from which the quotations are taken.

suppositions, and as a result he feels justified in using more passages than they do, and in providing a fuller picture of Jesus. For example, he gives more weight than they do to Jesus the moral teacher, who, he thinks, was interested in right conduct for its own sake, who sometimes supported and sometimes contradicted the Law without having any completely consistent theory on the subject, and incidentally whose understanding of moral priorities and motives was sometimes very much of his time and rather different from ours. If the rich man, for example, was to sell all his goods and give the proceeds to the poor, that was for the good of his soul, not the good of the poor. The reward motive is constantly present in the teaching of Jesus; demands for altruism, in our sense, are curiously lacking. In this and other directions Cadbury's picture is fuller than the one we considered earlier; and if it is less immediately attractive to twentieth-century eyes, it is in some ways a more plausible likeness of a first-century figure.

However, I am far from claiming that Cadbury has all the answers. I doubt, for example, whether the Jesus who emerges from his pages is a sufficiently distinctive figure to account plausibly for the rise of the Church. Even at the level of his humanity, the figure who gave rise to the Christian community must assuredly have been a remarkable one and inspired with a sense of some very special relationship to God.

I have cited Cadbury for two reasons. First to make quite clear that we are still in no position to talk of 'assured results'; and secondly because I suspect that the future may lie to some extent with his type of approach. I mean that as we learn to approach the Gospel material with a more wary eye for our modern presuppositions, we may find that more of it can be used for historical reconstruction and that a many-sided figure emerges whose various activities are not unified in an entirely co-ordinated way – a figure less coherent and clear-cut than the Jesus of the new quest; one, if I may put it so, with more loose ends.

If such a fuller picture were less immediately acceptable to our generation that would not be surprising. The more we learn from historians about the way all human existence and activity are relative to some particular cultural environment, the less can we expect that any human figure will be equally acceptable to different cultures. Jesus must have exercised attraction over many in his day, or there would have been no Church. It is hardly to be expected that if we, with our very different cultural background, could see him exactly



as he was we should find him speak to our condition in the same immediate way. I remember some years ago at the conclusion of a public lecture being asked by Mr Maurice Reckitt what I thought it was about Jesus that attracted his original disciples to him. That is a fascinating question, though I am not sure that there is any single answer and I certainly doubt if any of the answers hitherto propounded will do as they stand. Probably it was no single thing, and it has to be recognized that of the various grounds of attraction that were involved, whatever they may have been, some at least would not be likely to prove attractive to us. Something of what I have in mind was already expressed by Schweitzer in a well-known passage in 1906: 'The historical Jesus will be to our time a stranger and an enigma. The study of the life of Jesus has had a curious history. It set out in quest of the historical Jesus believing that when it found Him it could bring Him straight into our time as a Teacher and Saviour. It loosed the bands by which He had been riveted for centuries to the stony rocks of ecclesiastical doctrine, and rejoiced to see life and movement coming into the figure once more, and the historical Jesus advancing, as it seemed, to meet it. But He does not stay; He passes by our time and returns to His own.'<sup>22</sup> I have always supposed it was something of the same sort R. H. Lightfoot had in mind when he concluded his Bampton Lectures with the words: 'Only when we see him hereafter in his fullness shall we know him also as he was on earth. And perhaps the more we ponder the matter, the more clearly we shall understand the reason for it, and therefore shall not wish it otherwise. For probably we are at present as little prepared for the one as for the other.'<sup>23</sup>

In view of what has happened since those words were written, perhaps we shall have to *make* ourselves more prepared. Let me, however, make clear what it is we may have to prepare ourselves for. I am not suggesting that any picture of Jesus is likely to emerge in which he is revealed as essentially wrongheaded or in any way morally repugnant. What I am prophesying – very tentatively – is a figure who because he belonged fully to the first century cannot belong in the same way to ours. What I have in mind is not simply that Jesus will have used categories and made assumptions which from our point of view are mythological and so need demythologization or whatever; though no doubt that is true. What I am questioning is whether Jesus' self-understanding and claims are likely to

<sup>22</sup> *Quest* (ET 1910), p. 397.

<sup>23</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 225.

have been as neat and succinct, as self-conscious and clearly-defined, as some modern scholarship seems to imply. For one thing, if they had been, it is hard to see why, in a first-century Jewish context, Jesus did not express them in terms of an explicit messianic claim. Is it not in fact more likely that his awareness of what he was after was, like any human awareness, somewhat confused and diffused, halting and tentative? Very probably, as we have seen, he believed, as many prophets had done before him, that he was standing in the midst, or on the threshold, of a unique cosmic crisis and that his activities were in some way essentially related to it. But he may have had no single consistent idea of what that relationship was, and his picture of how the crisis was likely to develop may well have been compounded in a rather unco-ordinated way from traditional Jewish calculations and expectations, and his own meditations and experience. And is it not likely that so far as the claims and outlook attributed to him by the scholars of the new quest were implicitly present in his mind and expressed in his actions, they were associated, though not fully co-ordinated, with other actions, beliefs and claims, both religious and moral, some of which we should not find so immediately acceptable?

Is such a position with regard to the historical Jesus compatible with a full-blooded Christian faith? Obviously that question raises profound theological issues and cannot be fully canvassed here; but perhaps I may say this.

Orthodoxy has tended to assume – and I think the Bultmann school<sup>24</sup> and most other modern New Testament scholars are still influenced by this assumption – that if we could discover Jesus exactly as he was in the days of his flesh we should find no occasion of stumbling of any sort in him except such as arose out of the contrariety between his perfection and our sin. One example may help to illustrate the implications of such an assumption. When the question of messianic claims is raised, those who believe Jesus made such claims seem almost always to assume that his conception of Messiahship was deeply influenced by the Servant Songs of deutero-Isaiah and was such as to commend itself without reservation to an enlightened modern outlook. Whether Jesus claimed to be Messiah is a question I find impossibly hard to decide; but if he did, is it not on every count likely that he drew into his conception of the Messiah elements from the political and religious atmosphere

<sup>24</sup> Though not Bultmann himself.

he breathed, elements from the Jewish tradition and from the revolutionary enthusiasm of his day which he never fully isolated or refined but which everyone today would find at least partially unacceptable?

If I am right, I suppose one way of dealing with the situation theologically would be to invoke kenotic ideas on an unusually radical scale; and that may be the right way forward. But on a first reading of Dr John Knox's new book *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ*, I have noticed a distinction which might be useful in this connexion. Dr Knox distinguishes between what we may call 'event' christologies and what we may call 'person' christologies. By this distinction he seeks to draw attention to the fact that whereas Christians from early times have thought of Jesus as a pre-existent supernatural being made flesh and have asked who he was and by what process he became incarnate, it is also possible to pose the problem – as Knox thinks the very earliest Christians in fact did – in the form: What was happening in Christ? or What was God doing in him?<sup>25</sup>

Especially if we adopt this latter approach, is it not possible to hold that Jesus was genuinely, limitedly and confusedly human in the way I have suggested and yet to hold that God was uniquely active in and through him, disclosing to those of his contemporaries who would follow him all the new religious and moral truth they could assimilate, and on the basis of it forging them into a community round the earthly Jesus, waiting with him for the coming of the expected crisis and then after his resurrection empowered by his spirit and led into further truth? In that case much of what the later Christians said about Jesus, the virgin birth and the ever more exalted titles they attributed to him, would fall to be seen as expressions, more or less adequate to their time and place, of their developing realization of what a unique and truly wonderful work God had begun through him.

A good deal depends on how you understand what God was seeking to do in Christ. If you define his purpose in terms of the bringing together of divine and human substance in a hypostatic union or in terms of providing an infinitely valuable satisfaction for our sin, then you will probably understand the divine in Christ in such a way that my suggested picture of the humanity will not easily harmonize with it. If, however, you believe that God was seeking to do through Jesus what he has in fact done, bring into existence a community under the lordship of the risen one, in which reconciliation with God him-

<sup>25</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 57 and thereabouts.

self and the power of a holy life should become, at least potentially, a reality, then I suggest the picture of the earthly Jesus I foresee will be acceptable enough.

Of course if you consider that picture of the historical Jesus apart from the divine activity, it will seem completely incommensurate with what God purposed to do, and has done, through him. But then that surely is true of any view of Christ's humanity in separation from the divine action in him.

If, as Dr John Knox and our chairman, Dr W. N. Pittenger, assert, 'the divinity of Jesus was the deed of God. The uniqueness of Jesus was the absolute uniqueness of what God did in him,'<sup>26</sup> then I cannot see why the picture I have tentatively suggested should not be compatible with the fullest Christian faith. For as Dr Knox again puts it: <sup>27</sup> 'For all the goodness and greatness of Jesus, the wonder of his manhood, the qualities of mind and spirit which lift him so far above us, he was still a human being like ourselves. Not only should we not want it otherwise; we ought not to be able to bear it otherwise.'

<sup>26</sup> John Knox, *The Death of Christ*, p. 125; cf. W. N. Pittenger, *The Word Incarnate*, *passim*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

*G. B. Caird*

WORDS CAN be tyrants. We all speak of development in the theology of the New Testament, and no doubt we are right to do so. Where there is life, there is growth; and the apostolic age was a period of ebullient vitality. But no sooner do we use the word 'development' than a process of suggestion sets in. Development in other spheres of activity or experience denotes the change from child to adult, from simplicity to sophistication; and it is all too easy to slip into the unquestioned and largely unfounded assumption that this was the course of New Testament thought also. The same may be said of the word 'primitive'. We speak of the 'primitive church', correctly meaning the church of the earliest days after the resurrection of Jesus. But the word 'primitive' tends to carry associations of crude, naïve, and untutored beginnings, which readily intrude upon our assessment of early Christianity. That Christian doctrine had a primitive stage in this second and pejorative sense is an assumption which we bring to the study of the New Testament, not a conclusion we derive from its evidence. A different sort of tyranny is wielded by the word 'pre-Pauline'. It was, to be sure, a momentous discovery that there was Christian theology before Paul. But what do we mean by 'before Paul'? There is, for example, a strong body of opinion, in which I do not happen to share, that Philippians 2.5-11 is a pre-Pauline hymn. Was it, then, written before the conversion of Paul? Or before the writing of Paul's earliest epistle? Or merely before the writing of Philippians? Was the author totally outside the Pauline circle, or could he have come under the influence of Paul? Could he have been a younger disciple of Paul (since it is not unknown for teachers to quote their pupils), or perhaps even the younger Paul himself?

Behind the bondage imposed by these words lies the postulate that all development must be as logical as Euclid. You must cross the Pons Asinorum before you are ready for parallel lines and Pytha-

goras. We therefore tend to assign anything that looks simple, elementary, or unreflective to an early stage in the process and anything that looks complex, advanced, and profound to a later stage. But there is no conversion table which enables us to exchange a logical sequence for a chronological one. The Pastoral Epistles, though later than Paul and written by an admirer of Paul, are theologically naïve in comparison with the genuine epistles of Paul.<sup>1</sup> The First Epistle of Clement was written in the same decade as the Fourth Gospel and the Revelation, and was written by a man who had read the epistles of Paul and the Epistle to the Hebrews; yet Irenaeus (*Haer.* iii.3) is surely indulging in hyperbole when he points to it as a signal monument to apostolic Christianity. Barnabas Lindars has given us an excellent example of the dangers of confusing the logical and the chronological when he shows that there was a logical development in the use of Isaiah 6.9-10, but that the earliest stage is represented by John and the latest by Mark.<sup>2</sup> But for our purpose the most interesting evidence is to be found in the work of Luke. Anyone who thought it a profitable enterprise to classify the New Testament writers according to the height of their christology would have to say that Mark's christology is higher than Luke's. Now it is true that Luke habitually prefers his non-Markan sources to Mark, but we cannot use this preference to explain away his use of Mark. Luke is a theologian in his own right, and his theology is his own, however much he may have derived from authentic sources. In Mark and Q, 'Son of God' is a high christological title, but in Luke Jesus is Son of God because he can trace his descent back to Adam. Luke's interest from start to finish is in the human Jesus, 'a man singled out for you by God' (Acts 2.22), and 'anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power' (Acts 10.38). Moreover, as C. F. D. Moule has recently pointed out,<sup>3</sup> although Luke's sources contained a number of references to the prevalent belief of the early church in a corporate Christ (e.g. Acts 9.4; 22.7; 26.14), Luke's Jesus, whether on earth or exalted in heaven, remains an individual. A comparison between Luke and Mark discloses two further characteristics of Lucan theology: Luke has omitted from his Gospel any sayings which give atoning significance to the Cross, presumably because he regarded

<sup>1</sup> In his book *Church Order in the New Testament*, Edward Schweizer actually cites Matthew, Luke, and the Pastorals as evidence for the thought and practice of the pre-Pauline *Urgemeinde*.

<sup>2</sup> *New Testament Apologetic*, pp. 159-167.

<sup>3</sup> *The Phenomenon of the New Testament*, pp. 36ff.

the whole life and ministry of Jesus as God's saving act; and he has consistently toned down Mark's future eschatology.

The importance of all this becomes plain when we try to use the speeches in Acts as an historical source. I do not question that Luke was using, here as elsewhere, reliable sources, but this is not to say that he used them without editorial alteration. We should expect him to have edited his sources here at least as much and in the same direction as he edited Mark. But this means that it is precisely at those points where commentators have detected 'primitive' elements in the speeches that we ought to suspect the editorial hand of Luke.

I am well aware that the theory of development I am attacking has had a long and honourable history. Eighty years ago in his *History of Dogma* Harnack declared that there were five elements which had gone to the making of catholic Christianity.<sup>4</sup> These were: (1) the Gospel of Jesus Christ; (2) the common preaching of the first generation of believers; (3) Palestinian Judaism, with its current exposition of the Old Testament, its speculations and hopes for the future; (4) the religious philosophy of the Hellenistic Jews; and (5) the religious disposition and philosophy of the Graeco-Roman world. He believed, as did other Liberal Protestants, that it was possible to peel off the successive layers, and so to arrive at a Jesus who was substantially free from dogma. The prodigious labours of the History of Religions School sharpened the tools for Harnack's task without attempting to alter its essential nature. Bultmann and the Traditio-historical School of his successors have introduced some changes which at the time seemed momentous, but which in retrospect can be seen to be minor adjustments of Harnack's programme.

I would not for a moment suggest that this whole enterprise has been misconceived, but I think it is time that we seriously questioned four of its presuppositions.

1. The hard and fast distinction between Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism, and therefore between Palestinian and Hellenistic Christianity can now be seen to be based on two fallacies: that the Mishnah is normative for first-century Palestinian Judaism, and that Philo is normative for the Judaism of the Diaspora. Qumran has given the *coup de grâce* to the first of these. As for the second, we have it on the evidence of Philo himself that there were at least three types of Jew in Alexandria in his day – the literalists, the pro-

<sup>4</sup> Tr. N. Buchanan, Vol. I, p. 57.

gressive and the middle-of-the-road men like Philo himself;<sup>5</sup> and we also know that the Diaspora synagogues maintained close touch with Jerusalem, and that there were plenty of Hellenists living in Jerusalem and throughout Palestine.

2. We have to take very seriously the warning of Dom Gregory Dix that there is no heightening of the christology when we move from a Jewish Christian setting, where the relation of Jesus to God is expressed in terms of function, to a Gentile Christian setting, where it is expressed in terms of status or origin. 'The Jewish evidence about "Messiahship" is decisive. The *function* of the Messiah is a Divine function; His bringing in the "Kingdom of the Heavens" is God's own bringing in of His own Kingdom; the Messiah's action in history is starkly identified again and again with God's own action in history.'<sup>6</sup> Dix goes on to claim that this Jewish attitude is exemplified in the Jewish Christian materials used by Mark, but he could have gone much further than this. The Fourth Gospel, for all its thin Greek veneer, stands firmly in the same Jewish tradition: it makes and can make no higher claim for Jesus than that the Father has entrusted him with the doing of his own work, and has given him authority to pass judgement, because he is Son of Man (John 5.17-27).

3. It is characteristic of the method we are considering that it treats the New Testament as a patchwork of ideas drawn from Jewish and pagan sources, instead of seeing it as a new and coherent unity. Parallels to the New Testament in other literatures and religions are in themselves no evidence of dependence; and, even where dependence can be proved, the fact remains that to trace a word, an idea, or a practice to its origin helps us very little to explain what it means in its new setting. A probe into the pre-Mosaic origins of the Jewish Passover tells us nothing about the Christian Eucharist. Bultmann has told us that the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel had a previous existence as a Gnostic hymn, and for all I know he may be right. But even if this could be proved beyond reasonable doubt, it would be a fact of singularly little importance to the commentator on the Gospel. What the hymn meant to its supposititious Gnostic author may provide an interesting exercise for the antiquarian. But for the exegesis of the Gospel all that matters is what it meant to the

<sup>5</sup> For the literalists see *Somm.* I, 16.102; *Conf.* 5.14; and for the progressives see *Migr.* 16.89; and for the whole subject see H. A. Wolfson, *Philo*, Vol. I, pp. 57-73.

<sup>6</sup> *Jew and Greek*, p. 80.



Evangelist; and this we can discover only by reading the Gospel.

4. One of the main principles of form-critical procedure has been that any element in the Gospel tradition which can be shown to correspond to the theology or practice of the Christian community cannot be properly attributed to Jesus. We are asked to countenance the existence of a community whose beliefs and teaching at no point coincided with those of its founder. It is hardly surprising that even Bultmann cannot apply such a criterion consistently. On the evidence of the epistles eschatology was clearly one of the dominant interests of the early church and therefore the one element in the teaching attributed to Jesus which is most unmistakably marked out for the critical axe; yet this is one of the few elements which Bultmann declares to be undoubtedly authentic. The whole critical method so obviously dissolves into arbitrary subjectivity that it ought to have been abandoned long ago.

Harnack's programme of doctrinal development, which in one form or another we have all been taught to take for granted, turns out to be a serious over-simplification. I do not claim to have a scheme of my own to put in its place; and if I had, it would certainly be open to equally damaging criticism. I am not in favour of the modern cult of methodology or hermeneutics as a substitute for the study of the New Testament. What I want to do instead is to look, with as few presuppositions as possible, at two neglected aspects of New Testament christology, and to see where the evidence will lead us.

# I. THE MANHOOD OF CHRIST

My first contention is that the writers of the New Testament show remarkable unanimity in their treatment of the manhood of Christ. Let us begin with the Epistle to the Hebrews. The epistle opens with a long catena of Old Testament quotations about the relative positions of Christ and the angels, the point of which appears only in the second chapter.

For it is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, which is our theme. But there is somewhere a solemn assurance which runs:

'What is man, that thou rememberest him,  
Or the son of man, that thou hast regard to him?  
Thou didst make him for a short while lower than the angels;  
Thou didst crown him with glory and honour;  
Thou didst put all things in subjection beneath his feet.'

(2.5-8)

The author has adopted the Jewish eschatology of the two ages, and has assumed that Psalm 8 is a description of man, not just as he is in empirical fact, but as he is in the eschatological intention of God. During the first age God has set man under the authority of angels, including the angelic mediators and guardians of the Torah (2.2), which, together with its whole system of priesthood and sacrifice, the epistle will show to be obsolescent, because it was only ever designed by God to be provisional and preparatory (1.14; 10.1). The angels of the old regime, under whose control man must live 'for a little while', were never addressed in the Old Testament in the exalted terms which God reserved for man; they were 'ministering spirits, sent out to serve for the benefit of those who were to inherit salvation'. The new age, the age of salvation and fulfilment, God has put under the authority of man. Already in the predestining decree of God man is crowned with glory and honour, and has all things subdued to his control. The author goes on to comment that we do not yet see man in this position of universal authority, so that in this sense 'the world to come' is still to come. Yet in another sense it is already present, because 'in Jesus . . . we do see one who for a short while was made lower than the angels, crowned now with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that, by God's gracious will, in tasting death he should stand for us all' (2.9). It was the will of God that Jesus should live his life under the same conditions as other men, sharing the flesh and blood, the sufferings and temptations, the common lot of subjection to angelic authority. Only when under these conditions he had explored to the utmost the meaning of obedience, was he fully qualified to be something more (2.10; 5.7-8). Only with his death and resurrection did the new order begin to break in upon the old. Only then did he become the head of a new humanity, first-born of many brothers, the pioneer leading many sons to glory, taking to himself not angels but the sons of Abraham, qualified by sympathy to represent them in the presence of God as their great high priest.

In the light of this clear exposition of Psalm 8, we can now see the point of the quotations in the first chapter. They are designed to prepare us for the idea that God has always intended man to attain to a dignity above that of the angels. Among these quotations is one from Psalm 110, the psalm which speaks of the new order of priesthood associated with the name of Melchizedek. The authority to which Christ has been raised as king and priest at the right hand of God is simply identified with the honour and glory which

are said in Psalm 8 to be the destiny of man. It is important to notice, however, that our author does not identify the enemies who are to be subdued by this priest-king with the angels of the old legal order. They are ministering spirits, whose word, while it lasted, remained valid, and who, at the advent of the First-born, worship him and so acknowledge the transience of their own authority and the superiority of his (1.4-5; 1.14-2.2). Partly for this reason, and partly because the angels of the law are mentioned in the speech of Stephen, we can dismiss any notion that our author is here dependent on the theology of Paul.

When we turn to Paul we find that he, too, quotes Psalm 8 and Psalm 110 in a single passage. 'For he is destined to reign until God has put all enemies under his feet; and the last enemy to be abolished is death. Scripture says, "He has put all things in subjection under his feet"' (I Cor. 15.25-27). Here, as in Hebrews, Psalm 8 is being interpreted eschatologically. God has decreed that Christ should exercise authority over the whole universe, and this decree is now in the process of realization. He is already king *de jure*, and must reign until he is king *de facto*. The difference between this passage and Hebrews is that here the angels of the old order are being identified with the enemies who need to be subdued, the principalities and powers, the elements of this present world. There might, indeed, seem to be a second difference. We might suppose that Paul was treating Psalm 8 messianically; i.e. not as a description of the destiny of man, now fulfilled in some representative fashion by Christ, but as a messianic prophecy of the unique glory of the reign of Christ. But this is in fact not so. For this passage forms an integral part of Paul's comparison between the old corporate manhood of Adam and the new corporate manhood of Christ. As the sequel shows, it was only at the resurrection that Christ became head of the new humanity, the second, the heavenly, the spiritual man. Up to that point, like other men, he had borne the image of the man of dust, and had been subject to the angels of the old order, living under the law and under the dominion of man's last enemy (Gal. 4.4; Rom. 6.9).

The spiritual does not come first; the animal body comes first, and then the spiritual. The first man was made 'of the dust of the earth': the second man is from heaven. The man made of dust is the pattern of all men of dust, and the heavenly man is the pattern of all the heavenly. As we have worn the likeness of the man made of dust, so we shall wear the likeness of the heavenly man (I Cor. 15.46-9).

In Romans we find a slightly different application of Psalm 8:

The created universe waits with eager expectation for God's sons to be revealed. It was made the victim of frustration, not by its own choice, but because of him who made it so; yet always there was hope, because the universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality and enter upon the liberty and splendour of the children of God (Rom. 8.19-21).

Man fell and became subject to futility and death by his own sinful choice (1.21; 5.12); the sub-human creation became involved in his fall, not of its own choice, but because God had decreed that it should be subject to man.<sup>7</sup> God could be said to decree this in hope, because already at the fall of Adam he knew how, through the second Adam, he was to liberate both man and his universe from the consequences of the fall. It had been God's intention that the physical universe should attain its perfection only under the lordship of man; and, in the absence of that lordship, it had fallen, like man himself, under the control of other powers. Only when man's victory over the powers was complete could the universe become what God had intended it to be. The proof of man's involvement in the cosmos is his physical body, which shares with all the sub-human world the agonizing hope of ultimate deliverance. Since the fulfilment of Psalm 8 is here so clearly related to the redemption or resurrection of the body, it is likely that Dodd is justified in seeing a further allusion to the same psalm in Phil. 3.21: 'He will transfigure the body belonging to our humble state, and give it a form like that of his own resplendent body, by the very power which enables him to make all things subject to himself.'<sup>8</sup>

These cosmic implications of Psalm 8 lead us now to ask whether Paul's doctrine of the manhood of Christ does not also underlie the cosmic christology of Colossians 1.15ff. The passage begins by designating Christ 'the image of the unseen God'. It has generally been assumed that this is a piece of Wisdom christology (cf. Wisdom 7.26), and I do not wish to question that this is one ingredient in the complexity of Paul's thought. But I have two reasons for believing that it is no more than a tributary to the main stream. My first reason is that later in Colossians Paul exhorts his readers to 'put on the new manhood which is being constantly renewed in the

<sup>7</sup> Τὸν ὑπορξάντα is an echo of the ὑπέρτατος of Ps. 8.7, and therefore must refer to an action of God.

<sup>8</sup> *According to the Scriptures*, p. 33.

image of its Creator' (3.10). Now to put on the new manhood is the same thing as putting on Christ (Gal. 3.27); and it seems improbable that Paul would have used the word 'image' christologically twice in one letter in totally unrelated senses. My second reason comes from Ephesians. Whatever opinions we may hold about the authorship of Ephesians, there is one statement about it which can be made with every expectation of commanding general assent: it is the earliest commentary on Colossians, written either by Paul himself or by one of his closest friends. Now the parallel passage in Ephesians quotes from both Psalm 8 and Psalm 110, and thus attributes Christ's cosmic lordship not to his divine origin but to his human achievement, since his exaltation to the right hand of God has established him in that supremacy which God always intended to put into the hands of man. In Christ, crucified and risen, God has created a new humanity, in which Jew and Gentile are united; and his ability to break down the wall which divided them is taken as proof of his ability and intention to reduce all parts of the discordant universe to a unity in Christ (1.10). It seems likely, then, that in Colossians Christ is called the image of God, primarily at least, because he fulfils God's purpose for man, and so also for the cosmos at large.

The First Epistle of Peter has little to offer in the way of christology, but it may be worth our while in passing to take note of one passage in which there is a composite allusion to Psalms 8 and 110. It speaks of Jesus being at the right hand of God, after angels, authorities, and powers had been made subject to him (3.22). If we had not already found three instances in which these two psalms were combined, we might fail to notice the combination in the present case. Yet it is there, and we have not the slightest reason to suppose that it is borrowed from Paul. It has been suggested that the difficult passage to which this verse forms the conclusion was an early credal hymn. All I should wish to say about that is that it presupposes an exegesis of these two psalms which is older than the author of the epistle, since he takes it wholly for granted.

The Fourth Gospel contains few quotations from the Old Testament, and might therefore seem to be an unpromising field in which to pursue our investigation. On the other hand, one of its most characteristic themes is the glorification of the Son of Man; and it is proper for us to ask whether Psalm 8 is not one of the several Old Testament texts which have moulded the evangelist's thought at this point. The glorification or exaltation of Jesus is the Cross, where

he receives a new access of glory: 'Glorify me . . . with the glory which I had with thee before the world began' (17.5). But we have to remember that this eternal glory of the Logos had already been imparted to the man Jesus at the Incarnation, 'glory such as belongs to an only Son' (1.14); and that he had manifested this glory constantly in the signs which comprised his ministry (2.11). Why then does he pray for that which he already possesses? The answer is that, in the Fourth Gospel, as in Paul and Hebrews, the Cross is the moment when the manhood of Jesus ceases to be individual and becomes corporate. 'I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself' (12.32). He prays therefore as the representative of all who by the Cross are to be drawn into the unity of his person. 'The glory thou gavest to me I have given to them, that they may be one, as we are one' (17.22). Thus the glorification of the Son of Man turns out to be not his individual triumph only, but the fulfilment of man's destiny to be crowned with glory; though it must be added that John has given to the word 'glory' a deeper significance than it had before.

## II. THE PRE-EXISTENCE OF CHRIST

We must now turn to the other side of the picture – the pre-existence of Christ. For the three writers who have been our primary witnesses to testify to the central importance of the manhood of Christ are also the ones who tell us that his existence did not begin with human birth. The question which forces itself on our attention is whether their ideas of pre-existence are in any way connected with the idea of God's predetermined destiny for man which we have seen to be involved in the generally accepted exegesis of Psalm 8.

First we may dismiss the notion that Christ pre-existed as man. Reitzenstein's theory that the New Testament belief in the pre-existence of Christ was derived from a Graeco-oriental *anthropos* myth, a myth of the heavenly man, has for very good reasons few surviving advocates today. Much of his evidence was drawn from later Christian deviations; and in Philo's *De Opificio Mundi* and the Hermetic Tractate *Poimandres*, both of which are demonstrably the product of speculation on Genesis 1, the heavenly man is a cosmological figure used to explain the creation of man, not a soteriological figure used to bring about his salvation. But the important point is that, even if the biblical writers had been acquaint-

ted with such speculation about a heavenly man, they would emphatically have dissociated themselves from it. Paul calls Christ 'the man from heaven'; but he explicitly tells us that the heavenly man is second in time, not first, and that Christ did not become heavenly man at his birth, but at his resurrection (I Cor. 15.45-47). Before his birth Christ existed in the form of God (*ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ*); the human bondage was what he assumed when he chose to surrender his divine prerogatives (Phil. 2.6-7). To be sure, the Fourth Gospel speaks of the Son of Man as having come down from heaven (3.13); but if we press this form of language to the point of insisting that he must have pre-existed as man, we shall find ourselves in trouble. For later in the Gospel Jesus claims also to be the living bread which came down from heaven, and then goes on to explain that this bread which he gives for the life of the world is his flesh (6.33, 41, 50, 51, 53). Jesus cannot be thought to have pre-existed as bread, still less as flesh. Flesh is what the Logos became at the Incarnation, and in John's vocabulary flesh means manhood. In any case we have John's unequivocal statement that Jesus pre-existed as Logos, and that the Logos was God.

When we come to examine the possible Jewish sources, we must discriminate between various kinds of pre-existence. What, for example, do we mean when we describe the personified Wisdom as pre-existent? When the Apocrypha Translation Panel of the New English Bible was working on Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon, we had to decide when to use a capital W and when a lower case one. Our first ruling was that a capital should be used when wisdom was personified and a lower case letter when wisdom was either a divine attribute or a gift of God to men. The result was that we frequently found capitals and lower case letters alternating with each other in bewildering succession, and decided instead to use lower case letters throughout. Nothing could have proved as swiftly and as conclusively as did this experiment that our two authors persistently refused to abide by our neat distinctions. We were thus compelled to recognize that there is all the difference in the world between a personification and a person. Personification is a figure of speech whereby we treat as a person that which of its own nature is not a person. The personified Wisdom of Jewish literature remains from start to finish an activity or attribute of God, which God is ready to share with those who worship him, and especially with those who keep his law.

In Philo's account of the creation we meet another kind of pre-

existence. Philo associated the two separate creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2 with the creation of the two worlds of the Platonic philosophy – the ideal world of forms and the empirical, material world which is its copy. But the first creation took place entirely in the mind of God. Philo compares the double creation to the work of an architect, who, before ever he allows a builder to turn the first sod, has a plan of the city he is to build complete in his mind; and this noumenal world he identifies with the Logos. In this sense, therefore, pre-existence is simply another, more picturesque way of describing purpose or predestination.

But such ideas were by no means confined to the Hellenistic Judaism of Alexandria. The Midrashic commentary on Genesis, *Bereshith Rabba*, opens with a paragraph, based on Proverbs 8.30, in which the Torah is said to be the blueprint which God consulted when making the world. This interpretation was much older than the midrash in which it occurs, and indeed was almost certainly known to Paul. There is therefore no need to detect Greek influence. It is more likely that Philo was here following an older rabbinic tradition than that the rabbis were borrowing from Philo. For the identification of the Torah with the personified Wisdom first occurs on Palestinian soil, in the writing of Jesus ben Sira of Jerusalem, and it was this that set the rabbis thinking about pre-existence. In two places in the Babylonian Talmud we are told that seven things existed before the creation (the Torah, repentance, Paradise, Gehenna, the throne of glory, the temple, and the name of the Messiah), and in each case a biblical proof-text is provided.<sup>9</sup> This use of proof-texts might suggest that we are dealing merely with the extravagances of rabbinic exegesis; but, when we turn back to *Bereshith Rabba*, we find evidence of genuine theological reflection. For there we are told that, of all the things which preceded the creation, only the Torah and the throne of glory were actually created, while the rest had simply been decided on by God. I suggest that we have here an inchoate form of the distinction later drawn by John of Damascus between the antecedent will of God (what God wills of his own nature) and his consequent will (what he wills because of the sinfulness of men). Certainly repentance and Gehennah could be said to pre-exist only insofar as God foreknew the fall of man, and it is likely that the pre-existence both of Paradise and of the temple should be fitted into the situation in which sin

<sup>9</sup> *Pes.* 54a; *Ned.* 39b. The proof-texts are: *Prov.* 8.22; *Ps.* 90.2-3; *Gen.* 2.8; *Isa.* 30.33; *Ps.* 93.2; *Jer.* 17.22; *Ps.* 72.17.



had to be dealt with, whether by rewards and punishments or by sacrificial atonement. But the Torah and the reign of God belong to God's absolute and unconditioned purpose. According to the rabbis, it was in order to have a race of men capable of obeying the Torah that God set the creative process in motion. But if my suggestion is correct, then it follows that all pre-existent things could be said to exist, in one mode or another, within the purpose of God.

Before we move on to the New Testament, let us pause to note how easy it was for a Jewish theologian to combine his idea of a pre-existent Wisdom or Torah with his doctrine of man. For whatever cosmic functions Wisdom and Torah might acquire, each remained essentially a code of human conduct, a design for living which had the merit of being identical with the design of the whole universe. The same wisdom which was with God in the beginning, which traversed the whole arc of the firmament and plumbed the recesses of the abyss, had come to take up her residence in Israel (Ecclus. 24.3-12). In obeying the Torah Israel was therefore fulfilling God's purpose not merely for his chosen people but for man, and not merely for man but for the whole creation. It was God's good pleasure that in man his own wisdom should find a dwelling.

We are now in a position to do justice to the important fact that all three New Testament writers who speak of the pre-existence of Christ do so in express contradiction of Jewish claims about the Torah. Paul's conversion had been a transference of loyalty, in which Christ had come to occupy that central position in his life and thinking hitherto accorded to the Torah. In his exegesis of Scripture, where under rabbinic influence he had previously detected a reference to the Torah, he now found Christ. The rock from which Israel in the wilderness had drunk was not the Torah, as the rabbis affirmed, but Christ (I Cor. 10.4). This gives a high degree of plausibility to C. F. Burney's theory that in Colossians 1.15ff. Paul is adapting rabbinic exegesis of Genesis 1.1 and Proverbs 8.22 in such a way as to make Christ, and not the Torah, the *reshith* – the beginning, sum-total, head, and firstfruits – in, by, and for whom all things were created.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the Fourth Gospel declares that the eternal Logos has become man in Jesus Christ, and is not to be identified with the Law given by Moses, which was never intended by God to be anything other than a preparatory witness to Christ (1.17; 5.39). But it is in Hebrews that this theme receives its fullest and most explicit treatment. Here the Torah, the word spoken

<sup>10</sup> *Journal of Theological Studies* 27 (1926), pp. 175f.

by angels, is shown by its own testimony to have only a shadow of the good things that were to come after it (10.1), and to belong to that brief period of man's history set by divine decree under the dominion of those angels who were ministering spirits charged with preparing the way for the full and final word of salvation. Not through the fragmentary and prophetic words of the Torah, but through Christ has God spoken his whole purpose, since it was through Christ that he made the world and for Christ's authority that he designed its age of fulfilment (2.5).

Since these three writers agree in employing Jewish categories, it is at least a reasonable supposition that they understood what they were doing: that is to say, that they ascribed pre-existence to Jesus because they wanted to claim for him all that the Jews had claimed for the Torah, because they believed that in him God's purpose for man, and therefore for the whole cosmos, had become an earthly reality. This way of approaching New Testament christology would disencumber us from the outset of one of the more vexatious problems of classical christology. In the debates which followed in succeeding centuries one of the major questions was: how could Jesus Christ be both man and God without either diminution of his Godhead or absorption of his humanity? For the New Testament writers this question never even arose. They held that the union of the human and the divine which had been achieved in Jesus was precisely that which God had intended from all eternity as the destiny of man.

There is, however, one difficulty that remains unresolved. Jewish antecedents adequately explain all the terminology used in the New Testament to describe the pre-existent Christ, but they cannot explain how Christians came to belief in his pre-existence as a person; for the Jews had believed only in the pre-existence of a personification. Wisdom was a personification, either of a divine attribute or of a divine purpose, but never a person. It is true that not all the New Testament theologians thrust this question upon us. Neither the Fourth Gospel nor Hebrews ever speaks of the eternal Word or Wisdom of God in terms which compel us to regard it as a person. If we are in the habit of crediting them with such a belief in a pre-existent person, and not just a pre-existent purpose, it is because we read them in the light of Paul's theology. Paul alone attributed to the pre-existent Christ a personal act of choice. 'You know how generous our Lord Jesus Christ has been: he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor' (II Cor. 8.9). 'He did not

think to snatch at equality with God, but made himself nothing, assuming the nature of a slave' (Phil. 2.6-7). In this respect, the highest christology in the New Testament is also the earliest.

If then, finally, we ask what influence caused Paul (or his predecessors) to move from the Jewish belief in a pre-existent personification to the Christian belief in a pre-existent person, there can be only one answer. It was the person of Jesus. Paul has often been, quite unjustly, accused of having little or no interest in the earthly life of Jesus. But it was because in the earthly life of Jesus the eternal purpose of God had appeared as a person that Paul and others after him found it impossible to imagine his pre-cosmic existence as anything other than personal.

## THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST IN THE PATRISTIC AGE

*M. F. Wiles*

PATRISTIC CHRISTOLOGY is an easy target. But easy targets breed carelessness in marksmen and many of the shafts that have been or are aimed at it in practice miss their mark. The Fathers did not desert a living response to the person of Christ and turn instead to the construction of arid formulae about him. Rather, because their response to him was so dominating a concern, they did not shirk the obvious responsibility which that faith laid upon them of loving the Lord their God with all their mind and coming to grips with the intellectual implications of their faith. In the execution of that proper and necessary intellectual task they did not regard the mysteries of the faith either as sacred preserves into which critical enquiry should not be allowed to enter or as philosophical puzzles which could be solved by the application of the rational intellect alone. It was the religious meaning of Christ for their day which was the subject-matter of their concern, and they had sufficient faith to believe that the fearless but humble application of the human mind to that task would enhance and not destroy that religious meaning and value. Nor can they justly be charged with abandoning the God-given categories of the scriptural witness and replacing them with the man-made concepts of Greek philosophy. To have refused the attempt to interpret the Gospel, and therefore the person of Christ as its centre, in contemporary Hellenistic terms would have been to bind a yoke of intellectual circumcision upon the Church which neither they nor we could have survived. Any deleterious influence which patristic christology may be felt to have had or still to have lies not in the task which it undertakes – *not* to have undertaken that task would have been a gross failure in Christian obedience; nor does it lie in any particular shortcomings in the way in which the task was in fact executed – I believe there were such shortcomings, and I shall try to indicate what I think some of the most important of them were, but they

are of a kind that we ought to expect to find in any attempt to deal with matters of such depth and magnitude; no, the real fault is to be seen in the spirit (characteristic especially of the later periods of the patristic age) which gave to some of the early formulations of christology an absoluteness of authority to which in view of their nature they had no right to aspire or to claim.

The basic difficulty in the statement of any doctrine of Christ is that it interacts at a very profound level with so many other fundamental doctrines. Christ is a functional title. It indicates one who stands in a special relationship to God and who performs a work of ultimate significance for the life of man. It interacts therefore especially with doctrines of God and of man's condition and man's need. I stress the word 'interacts'. It is not, in my judgement, possible even to understand what sort of a thing a doctrine of Christ would be, let alone what specific form it should take, without some prior beliefs about God and the human situation. One's doctrine of Christ is bound to be formulated at the outset very largely in terms of those prior understandings. Yet it in its turn will change and modify them. There can therefore be no clear or fixed starting point. Everything is in a state of flux.

The idea of the Logos which was the key concept in the earliest expressions of christological statement in the patristic era provided a means of affirming effectively many of the things which Christians wanted to say and needed to say about Christ if they were to do justice to the experience and teaching of the Church. To have lived in the Hellenistic world and not have made that link would have been to deny implicitly the universality and completeness of the Church's claims about Christ. But the Logos concept was so appropriate and effective a one to use precisely because it was the focal element in an already existing complex of ideas with comparatively well-developed notions of the nature of God and of the human condition. It was these that contributed so largely to its meaning and its power. They therefore also had to be brought into a relationship of interaction with the already existing notions of Christians on those fundamental themes. The identification of Christ as the Logos was a right move provided it was seen as a first move and not as an ultimate one. The process of interaction and mutual enrichment had to go on – as indeed it did.

I have deliberately called it a process of 'mutual enrichment'. It is commonly stressed – even by those who would agree that a process of interaction with Hellenistic ideas was both inevitable

and wholly proper – that the Greek conception of a metaphysically changeless God, who preserves his changelessness by means of essential detachment from the world, was one which had unfortunate consequences for Christian theology. That I would accept – provided it be also allowed that the whole process of interaction with Hellenistic thought made a contribution of substantial positive worth as well. Take one example of an important insight clarified and deepened – if not indeed newly given – by reflection on what it meant to identify Jesus with the Logos of God. Christians claimed that the touchstone of salvation for all men was to be found in faith in a man of recent times who had lived and died in an out of the way place on the periphery of the cultured world. The problem is still with us, but we do not so easily feel its emotive force – unless we stop to imagine what the faith would feel like if we were committed to proclaiming a Jesus who had lived and died in, let us say, Ceylon in the early years of the nineteenth century. Origen felt the problem in that kind of way and went so far as to admit that such words of Jesus as ‘If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin’ would be sheer arrogant nonsense if they referred simply to the historic Jesus. Origen was very far from being prepared to admit (as the words might seem to imply) that there was no such thing as real moral responsibility or moral culpability before the time of Jesus. The words were spoken by Jesus (so Origen believed), but were only true because he was identical with that Logos or rationality which is present to all men and without which it would be meaningless to speak of guilt or blame. The claims of the Gospel only carry conviction in his eyes if the one of whom the Gospel speaks and who speaks in the Gospel is more than a figure in history and is understood to be one who is related by his very being to the moral rationality of every man of every age.

I suggest – and clearly it is a value judgement which may well be disputed – that here we have a contribution of positive worth given to the Church’s understanding of Christ by the kind of process which was at the heart of patristic christological thinking. But the most central issue concerned the relationship of Christ to God. Here the concept of the Logos had a somewhat equivocal status in Greek thought. As mind or word of God the emphasis could fall either on its oneness with God, if the divine source or quality of its operations in the world needed to be stressed, or on its distinctness from God, if the eternal changelessness of God were in danger of

being called into question. The identification of Logos and Son made it more difficult for the Christian to turn a blind eye on occasion to the idea of a clear distinction between God and his Logos which in certain contexts both Greek and Christian thinkers wanted to be able to do. The image of father and son naturally suggests a greater measure of distinctness than that existing between a man and his word, let alone between a man and his mind. The introduction of the personalist element in Christian thought made it much more difficult to sustain that fluidity in the concept of Logos, which had been an essential part of the role which it had played in Hellenistic thought.

Logically it might appear that two courses were open to the Church. She could, with Marcellus, have played down the element of personal distinctness; she could have insisted that the Logos which was embodied and expressed in the life of Jesus was the very mind of God himself, *αὐτοουσία*, the divine essence itself, and restricted all talk of personal distinction, of a Father and a Son, exclusively to the period of the incarnate life. But this the Church was unwilling to do. Had she not baptized from earliest times (by Christ's own command, as she believed) in the threefold name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Did not the high-priestly prayer of John 17 speak of an eternal sharing of glory between the Father and the Son? No, it was of the essence of the Church's faith that the Logos-Son was a distinct and pre-existent being.

The obvious alternative solution was that of Arius – to accept fully the distinctness of the Logos-Son, to play down the correlative notion of eternal mind and to acknowledge that a distinct Logos-Son, though divine, can only be so in a secondary sense which is radically inferior to that of the changeless Father. But again the ordinary faith of the Church would have none of it. It was the Son who was the object of popular worship, the Son who was proclaimed and believed on as the ground of salvation. Could worship be offered to or salvation received from one who was anything less than fully God? No, it was of the essence of the Church's faith that the Logos-Son was divine in the fullest possible sense.

So at Nicaea the Church drew the inevitable conclusion. One can hardly call it the logical conclusion, for it was in defiance of the canons of contemporary logic. The Son was an entity distinct from the Father, yet fully and equally divine with him: he was *θεὸς ἀληθινὸς ἐκ θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ*. The Hellenistic conception of the Logos had enriched the Church's understanding of Christ, but it

had not been allowed to dominate it or to confine it to its own already existing bounds and conceptions.

Thus the theological content of the Creed of Nicaea was a natural and intelligible (though not necessary, in the sense of logically inescapable) outcome of interaction between the living faith of the Church and the traditional structures of Hellenistic thought. Up till that point one may properly speak of a process of development in which doctrinally speaking there are no absolutes, no definite fixed points. That is not to suggest for a moment that up till that point anything would have gone for Christian doctrine. Nothing could be further from the truth; one has only to recall the use of the rule of faith by Irenaeus or Tertullian. Yet their rule was flexible and could be expressed in a variety of different ways. But Nicaea changed all that. It wasn't *what* Nicaea said that was so new. Its content, as I have just argued, is fully explicable in the light of the preceding pattern of development. It was the *way* in which Nicaea said what it did say that was the really novel thing. Of course there had been synods and councils in the past, there had been a gradually increasing movement towards uniformity in the life of the Church. But the psychological impact of the historical moment of Nicaea was enormously influential. Even in the days of persecution the Church had regarded the imperial powers that were as ordained of God; and then, almost overnight, God's viceregent was to be found no longer persecuting but presiding over the largest and most representative gathering of bishops in the Church's history. Surely such a body in such a situation would be guided not merely to see the next step forward but to provide a firm and lasting answer on the fundamental issue of the Church's faith.

I am not suggesting that that was how Nicaea impinged immediately on its participants. The story of synods and counter-synods, of further creeds and counter-creeds which mark the ensuing quarter-century would be unintelligible if it had done. For a variety of reasons, political and theological, Nicaea was widely resented in the years immediately after its happening. But the recrudescence of radical Arianism in the middle of the century served to reinforce and justify its affirmations. Looking back at it from the vantage point of fifty years later it stood out as a rock, different in kind and in quality from any other statement of Christian doctrine. Here was a God-given fixed point in a world of such doctrinal giddiness that a fixed standing-ground was the most obvious thing which one would be likely to ask God to give.



Now this was precisely the moment at which the christological problem in the more precise sense, the problem of the nature of the incarnate person of Christ, was coming up for more detailed discussion and debate. And for this stage of the debate it is no longer true to say that everything was in a state of flux. Now there was a fixed starting-point. The problem of Christ's person could be posed in one way and in one way only. It was the problem of how the second hypostasis of the Godhead, distinct from, yet *ὁμοούσιος* with the Father, the *θεὸς ἀληθινὸς ἐκ θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ*, – of how he, the Logos-Son, whose eternal, fully divine, distinct existence was already known and affirmed, had become man. However difficult the problem might prove – and it could hardly have proved more difficult than it did – there could be no going back on the terms in which it was posed.

We are so used to the incarnational problem being posed in this kind of way that we normally fail to see that there is anything particularly odd about it. It seems after all a reasonable enough procedure in a complex piece of business to settle one issue first and in the light of that decision to move on to the next issue. But it perhaps sounds less self-evidently reasonable if we alter the analogy and speak of fixing irrevocably one term in the solution of an equation before the sum has been solved or indeed been shown to be patient of any solution on that assumption. Yet that is perhaps nearer to the situation (neither analogy, of course, should be pressed) in which the christologians at the end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth centuries found themselves.

It is a recurrent theme in the christological writing of the period – and particularly in conciliar decisions of a christological nature – to claim that all that a christological account is concerned to do is to expound the faith of Nicaea. This is especially, though not exclusively, true of Alexandrian christology. Now the creed of Nicaea speaks of the eternal Son of God being made flesh, becoming man, suffering and rising on the third day. The dominant concern of Alexandrian christology was to do justice to what was there stated. The eternal Son, he who was and is *ὁμοούσιος* with the Father, had taken flesh and suffered for mankind. It therefore had to be affirmed at all costs that the eternal Son was the subject of all the actions and all the sufferings of the incarnate Christ. Only so could the Church remain true to the faith of Nicaea and the Gospel of divine salvation. This, I say, had to be affirmed at all costs. If it could not be affirmed in what might seem its most obvious Apollinar-

ian form, it had still to be affirmed somehow or another. The cost that was paid was in fact the virtual elimination of the distinctive, individual, decision-making character of the humanity of Christ.

I do not believe that a full-blooded Alexandrian christology is a viable possibility for us today. But that makes it all the more important that we should take care not to do it any injustice. On two scores we are, I believe, always in danger of doing so.

In the first place, what seems to us an inadequate account of Christ's human nature – and indeed on our understanding of human nature may be so – need not be inadequate, at least to the same degree, on its own terms. Where that is the case, we ought to take care to stress that our complaint is not primarily with the intention of the christological construction but rather with the underlying anthropology in terms of which it was being worked out. The Platonic approach, according to which humanity as such is a more fundamental and more real concept than individual man, provided a framework of thought within which it seemed possible to make the essential Alexandrian affirmation of the subjecthood of the divine Logos throughout without destroying the humanity of Christ, or even reducing it in any really significant respect.

Secondly, it is temptingly easy to look upon the paradoxical ἀπαθὴς ἔπαθεν of Cyril as so blatantly self-contradictory that it constitutes a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*, which absolves us from the obligation of continuing to take his position at all seriously. But such a judgement again runs the risk of failing to assess his thought fairly from the standpoint of his own presuppositions. The way in which Cyril would have understood the relation between the immaterial soul of man and the experience of bodily suffering in ordinary human existence was of a kind which might well suggest that his paradox of 'impassible suffering' need not be self-evidently nonsensical. Alexandrian christology must not be too severely blamed if it fails to meet all the questions of a modern philosopher or psychologist.

Nevertheless, the conviction that there are serious difficulties inherent in the approach of Alexandria is not simply the outcome of a changed understanding of human nature in the modern era. Difficulties were also strongly felt at the time within the Antiochene school. Now the Antiochenes were facing the same questions as the Alexandrians in essentially the same terms. For them, too, the problem was the meaning of Nicaea in its affirmation of the incarnation and 'enmanment', the suffering and resurrection of the eternal

and impassible Son of God. But for them the essential logic of Nicaea was the logic of the two natures. It is their continual complaint that Alexandrian talk of the Son as the subject of the incarnate sufferings must inevitably break down the only dikes strong enough to hold back the flood waters of Arianism. A divine Son to whom suffering could be attributed could not be the fully divine Son, *ὁμοούσιος* with the Father, affirmed by the creed of Nicaea. For them, therefore, the thing that had to be asserted at all costs was the distinction of the two natures, a relative separation of divine and human within the one Christ.

But we have to avoid putting the Antiochene position in purely negative terms. From what has been said so far it might seem that the difference between Alexandrian and Antiochene christology was simply that, in the interaction between the gospel of divine condescension on the one hand and the conviction of divine impassibility on the other, the Alexandrians were prepared to allow more creative weight to the divine love. That is, I believe, a part of the story. The Alexandrians were, to their great credit, prepared to allow their religious conviction of the divine love to loosen up the stiffer joints of the existing intellectual framework of their ideas to a greater extent than the Antiochenes. But it is only a part of the story. The Antiochene insistence on the genuinely human character of Christ's moral struggles and of his physical sufferings was not only motivated by jealousy for the good name of divine impassibility. It was also a religiously determined response to the meaning which they found in the story of Jesus' whole life, death and resurrection. It is a sense of affinity with that motive in their approach to christology which has led to such a growth of interest in and appreciation of their work in recent years.

But we need to beware of describing that modern approach to christology which is sometimes dubbed 'degree christology' (and of which Dr Pittenger's work is so distinguished an example) as 'Antiochene' – whether that description be intended as a compliment or as the reverse. The difference can be brought out in a way which may serve at the same time to throw light on the basic drives of both Alexandrian and Antiochene christologies in their own day, which is my primary concern in this paper. The Alexandrian starting-point was the redemptive purpose of the eternal Logos-Son, and the dominant aim of all Alexandrian christology was to reveal the form of the Logos-Son's activity in the particular, crucial stage in the outworking of that eternal purpose, which we know as the

incarnation. The human life of Jesus was seen for the Alexandrian in its true light when it was seen as the temporary form of the eternal purpose of an eternal subject, the Logos-Son. From this approach flowed inevitably a playing down of the individuality of the human Jesus. In due course this worked itself out in a variety of ways – anhypostasia, enhypostasia and so forth – but it was the same dominant motif at work throughout. Now the Antiochene did not start from the exact opposite position. He shared the same devotion to Nicaea; he too insisted that the subject of the incarnation – in the sense of the act of incarnating, though not necessarily in the sense of every detailed occurrence in the incarnate life – was the Logos-Son, the second hypostasis of the Godhead. The Achilles heel of Antiochene christology was not therefore any defection from the anti-Arian position of Nicaea, any going back on the full divinity of the distinct Logos-Son; it was the danger of parallelism, of Nestorian division, of divine Son and human Jesus yoked together in a conjunction that seemed less than full unity. Much modern ‘degree christology’, on the other hand, seems to me to be a much more direct antithesis to the Alexandrian approach than was the Antiochene. It tends to take as its starting-point the empirical and historical fact of the liberating impact of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. What it is attempting to do is to give an adequate account of the meaning of the person of Jesus. For it, the one thing that cannot be doubted is not Nicaea’s affirmation of the distinct existence of the eternal Logos-Son, but the fact of Jesus as an individual, historical person. From such a starting-point it is as difficult to affirm the role of a personal, Logos-Son as subject of the incarnate life as it was for the Alexandrian to affirm the individual human personality of Jesus. The modern ‘degree christology’ ought not to be regarded as denying the divinity of Jesus any more than the post-Apollinarian Alexandrians can fairly be described as denying his humanity; but this will be a way of affirming the divinity, which by patristic – and perhaps indeed by any – standards will be likely to seem as unsatisfactory as the Alexandrian affirmation of Christ’s humanity appears to most of us. But it would certainly be as fair – or, if you prefer it, as unfair – to call him a Neo-Modalist as to call him a Neo-Arian.

But I have strayed beyond my brief which is an essentially historical one. I have attempted to say something about the way in which the patristic age gave expression to its conviction about the meaning of Christ. I have attempted to do so in the most general

terms, even though the Fathers themselves pursued the task with the utmost linguistic rigour and precision. My treatment has therefore been superficial, but sometimes surfaces are worth looking at in order to get the picture as a whole into perspective. The perspective I have tried to suggest to you is in the first instance the obvious one that the Fathers' debates about christology must be seen to have been concerned with issues of central importance which mattered and which still matter. That is not, of course, to suggest that we can simply carry on and treat their conclusions as our axioms – differences of world-view, of philosophical and anthropological outlook, preclude any such approach. But I have tried also to suggest a further, and I hope less hackneyed, difficulty about the whole pattern of christological work in the classical period of the fourth and fifth centuries. It seems to me that the debate between Alexandria and Antioch was being fought out with both combatants having one hand tied behind their backs. (Perhaps that was as well; they inflicted enough injury on one another single-handed, so that one shudders to think what they might have done with two.) Nicaea was a fixed point, an agreed axiom for all orthodox participants – fixed well before its implications for the further development of christology had been appreciated. And, in my judgement, it imposed a greater restriction of manoeuvring room upon the subsequent theologians than they ought to have been required to accept. It was within that particular, restricted setting that the Church fought and thought its way to Chalcedon. And if my judgement is at all right on this point, it means that we cannot usefully play the fashionable game of restating Chalcedon in modern terms unless we are prepared to play with equal seriousness the less fashionable game of an equally radical restatement of Nicaea.

## JESUS, THE REVELATION OF MAN

*F. W. Dillistone*

IN APPROACHING this theme I find myself thinking in terms of two possibilities. I can imagine, on the one hand, an already existing outline-shape – an original mental image or structure – which is made in some way to receive an actual embodiment and is thereby revealed or unveiled to the observation of those who have eyes to see. On the other hand I can imagine a living agent, an artist, a craftsman, who actually constructs a form as he wrestles with his already existing material. Only gradually and enigmatically does the form appear and the process of unveiling is never complete. In other words, when I am confronted by the word 'man' I am immediately challenged to ask: 'Is there, at the heart of reality, a pre-existent idea of "man" which has been openly revealed to me through some dramatic disclosure? Alternatively, has some process been in course of enactment, the whole object of which is to reveal the character and to identify the features of 'man'. Is 'man' a given category or idea, the shape of which has been revealed through an archetypal embodiment in space and time, or has man's identity been gradually revealed through being actually worked out in the midst of the struggle of earthly existence?

Looking back on the history of Christian thought these two possible approaches appear very clearly in theories which have been advanced concerning the humanity of Jesus. On the one side have been those who, beginning with the general idea of man in human reflection, have seen in Jesus the revelation of Perfect Man, Ideal Man, Integrated Man, Inclusive Man, Essential Man. On the other side have been those who, beginning with the actual story of Jesus in its concrete historical setting, have seen in him the revelation of Man in action, Man in relation to his environment, Man in relation to his fellows, Man as fulfilling his vocation within the pressures and limitations of an earthly existence. I do not say that these two approaches have no point of contact or place of meeting.

But history shows that at different periods, in different cultures, one or the other has tended to gain the major emphasis and to win the deeper interest. I believe that it is only possible to deal adequately with our subject if we allow the legitimacy of both these approaches.

## I

I propose to illustrate this opening statement by examining briefly two recent expositions of the manhood of Jesus. First I turn to Herbert Farmer's Ayer Lectures entitled *The Word of Reconciliation*. What does it mean, he asks, to be a reconciled man, reconciled through Christ? What distinctively characterizes the 'by-Christ-reconciled' man? The term reconciliation is central in the New Testament and it is a comprehensive word designed to cover all aspects of life. But how can we properly interpret it? Only, Farmer suggests, by keeping firmly in mind that Christ is able to be our Reconciliation, our Reconciler, just because he is in his own person 'supremely, fully, *par excellence*, the reconciled man'.

This, then, is the starting-point. Jesus is to be regarded as the perfectly reconciled man. He can only mediate reconciliation to others because of the fully reconciled character of his own human life. And (I quote again): 'We discern the nature of the reconciled life as set forth in the portrait of Christ in the Gospels more clearly and surely by means of the reconciliation which we can see him accomplishing in the lives of men as set forth in the remainder of the New Testament; and we discern the nature of the reconciled life as set forth in the remainder of the New Testament more clearly and surely by means of the reconciled life as set forth in Christ in the Gospels.'

From this point Farmer proceeds to ask what can be gathered from the Gospels to assist us in answering the question what it means to be a reconciled man. There is a certain stamp or style about the life of Jesus which in turn shapes the lives of others. He is reconciled in respect to the sin and evil which abound in the world: he is reconciled to the demands which God lays upon those who live in his world: he is reconciled to his fellow-men in a new kind of relationship. Each of these elements in the reconciled life is illustrated by parables and sayings and incidents taken from the Gospels. It is as if we are being guided by the author around a picture-gallery and he is telling us as we stand before each picture: there is one aspect of the reconciled life: there is another. And gradually the over-all

pattern or style emerges. In every case there is some outgoing in self-identification with a situation, with a person, with a requirement: there is a deliberate acceptance, an assuming of a burden: and there is finally a lifting-up of a fallen-ness, a mending of a broken-ness. We leave the picture-gallery with a richer and fuller impression of what it means to be a reconciled man. A shape, a pattern, a style, has been revealed and it is already stamped upon our own consciousness in such a way as to begin to transform us into the same image.

Farmer's general approach is exceedingly similar to that of Paul Tillich. In the latter's many-sided genius no aspect, I think, was more significant than his love of pictorial art, his appreciation and understanding of the great painters, his deliberate choice of terms belonging to the vocabulary of aesthetics. To him it was *the picture* of Jesus as the Christ in the New Testament that was of decisive importance. And in Tillich's own gallery, Christ as Saviour and Healer was the canvas to which he constantly returned. Jesus is the one in whom all the defects and diseases of life are healed. He is the one in whom all the finitudes and estrangements are reconciled. He is, Tillich writes in one place, 'the ultimate criterion of every healing and saving process'. Or again, 'in him the healing process is complete and unlimited'. And if we want again to define what could be called the over-all style, it is that of a life in which the self constantly goes forth into an actual participation and subjection and identification, accepts at depth the distinctive structures of human life as it finds them and gathers them all together within its own being, the being which has been vindicated as the New Being in Jesus the Christ.

What each of these great writers has in effect done is to start with a word, an idea. For Farmer it is reconciliation: for Tillich it is sometimes reconciliation, sometimes healing or salvation: for another it may be integration or unification. Each of these words encapsulates within its tiny structure a whole world of human sensitivities, a whole history of human experiences. Just as the human eye may be analysed as the unification of innumerable cells and the end-product of an indefinitely lengthy period of human evolution, so a great word such as reconciliation is the unification and fulfilment of complex processes impossible to define precisely. We may trace it back to its Latin and Greek forebears or to its Hebrew equivalents or to its primitive prefigurings, but when all is said and done the word stands there as representing something in human life and character which we recognize and value instinctively. We



can start with it as we enter the gallery of Jesus-pictures. And we can ask humbly and expectantly what new light upon the reconciled life, what correction of our ideas of the nature of the reconciled life, these pictures bring to us. And as we emerge from the gallery we can say, if faith has been gendered and strengthened: 'There is the perfectly reconciled man. There is the fully integrated man. In him I see the New Being, the New Creation, the New Harmony. May this revelation of reconciliation quicken my imagination and may imagination renew my life. May the pattern and shape and style which has now become clearer to me direct and govern all my own fumbling efforts towards the attainment of that ideal humanity which is, I believe, the design of God for the sons of men.'

If we read the later part of the New Testament we find clear evidence, it seems to me, that this is the essential process by which early Christians sought to be conformed to the picture of integrated humanity which they had seen in Jesus. They took such words as *agapē*, *katallagē*, *tapeinophrosunē*, and examined them afresh in the light of the revelation which had come to them through Jesus. In his humanity each of these ideas was checked and revised. Exposing themselves to the style once for all revealed through his own character, they were mysteriously and wonderfully changed into the same image even by the operation of the living Spirit of God.

## II

Secondly I turn to a remarkable book entitled *Literature and the Christian Life* by Sallie Te Selle, a lecturer in Yale Divinity School. At a number of places she focusses attention upon the manhood of Jesus and in effect upon Jesus as the revelation of Man. But there is no question this time of beginning with a word or a concept or an idea. Instead she begins with the record of a way of life, with what might, I think, be called a pilgrim's progress. She is concerned with a 'slow and agonizing way through the detail and limits of human temporality': a way through 'the muddiness and humour, the dynamism and limitation, the thickness and ambiguity of finite and particularly human reality': a way that can only be made known through a story which, like all stories, is partial but which reveals the nature of true and authentic manhood more effectively than any other medium is able to do.

The remarkable thing is that the Christian tradition does not depend simply upon one story. There is in fact in the New Testa-

ment a wealth of stories. Yet we have little doubt that behind them all there is a single career which was lived out amongst the tensions and complexities to which all men are in one way or another subject. And it is through paying attention to the details of any particular story that we begin to construct, each in his own imagination, a portrait of man sensitive to the demands coming to him through particular situations, acting in faith and courage in relation to these situations, intensifying his obedience to the call of God as every successive challenge in life makes its impact upon him. As Mrs Te Selle says: 'No thoughtful reader of the Gospels can deny that all three speak of the same man, a man whose outstanding characteristics are a joyful abandonment of self to the power and love of God in spite of all temptations and fears, and a spontaneous, imaginative compassion for the suffering of his fellow men. What Jesus demands of others in terms of total trust in God recorded in the Beatitudes, the imperatives on seeking the kingdom first and bearing the cross, and the comforting words about God's care for every hair on a man's head, is exemplified in his own life of complete reliance on the goodness of God. Likewise what Jesus demanded of others in terms of compassionate love toward all men is delineated in his own story. All three Gospel writers insist on Jesus' pity for suffering men, a compassion that is concrete, spontaneous and realistic' (p. 159).

All this may not seem particularly new. It is a summing-up of much that has been written by those engaged in the quest for the historical Jesus. Where, however, it seems to me that Mrs Te Selle has given us a valuable new insight is in her insistence that this portrayal of Jesus' humanity through story-form and through the recording of dramatic incidents is precisely related to the mood of our contemporary age which will not abide vague generalities, universal theories or even an idealistic sacramentalism. Man, she writes, 'sees himself as a self, an agent, who must take charge of things himself (even though he fails), who develops temporally, who moves towards insight (if he attains it at all) only through hard work and agony. This is certainly the root image of human life in *Herzog* and *Catch* - 22, in spite of the fact that the results of man's efforts are dismal, if not pathetic.' Moreover, she continues, 'it is also the biblical image of human life, in spite of the boost given to the sacramental model over the centuries by orthodox christology.' This image is 'a dynamic, temporal one that sees man as first of all an agent, a self', who stands self-revealed only in the midst of the density of temporal decisions.

What can be affirmed about the normal and normative biblical image of man is supremely true of the record of the man Jesus. It is characterized by deliberate speed, majestic instancy, existential commitment. He *is* what he *does*, uniquely, the way no one else does it. Again and again obedience to the call of the ultimate, and action in relation to the immediate situation, come together into a single coherence. This is the selfhood, the identity of Jesus. And it receives its supreme revelation in and through the event where, in a commonly-used phrase, Jesus was most of all himself. 'In his general intention to enact, in obedience to God, the good of men on their behalf, and, at the crucial juncture, his specific resolve to do so if necessary in this terrifying way – and in the event in which this intention and resolve were enacted, Jesus was most of all himself. This was his identity. He was what he did and underwent.'

Such a revelation of humanity does not place Jesus on a pedestal, remote from our strivings, the despair of our efforts to achieve. Rather it sets him in the midst of our world of urgent demands and inescapable decisions. But his uniqueness consists in the way in which every one of these demands was recognized as the call of God, every one of these decisions was on behalf of, for the sake of, others. In other words, Jesus did not become a man, true man, authentic man through some miraculous incarnation or through some singular breaking in of a new principle of human existence. Rather, using Mrs Te Selle's words, 'he became who he was only by means of decisions made in the particularity, ambiguity, and complexity of historical life.' And the implication of this is that modern man need not fear that to be a Christian is to nullify or to deny or even to rarefy what he believes to be the way of the achievement of authentic selfhood, namely, an openness to every situation and decision in relation to it. To be a Christian is to follow Jesus in his complete openness to every situation as mediating to him the demand and succour of God, in his use of every situation as a new means of committing himself to others in obedience to and in dependence upon the God whose concern is for the universal fulfilment of mankind.

### III

Is there today any generally accepted ideal for humanity which Jesus can be regarded as having perfectly embodied and thereby savingly revealed? Are there any categories or concepts or qualities sufficiently unambiguous as to provide a kind of rough sketch

which Jesus can be regarded as having filled in or filled out? I suppose that the chief competitor for such an office is the word 'love'. But it is noticeable that love is often being replaced by *agape* just because the word love has become too soiled and ambiguous. We are being invited to commit ourselves to the agapeistic way of life, to make *agape* the central category for the interpretation of the universe. Jesus, then, is set forth as the final revelation of *agape*, *agape* to God and to man. And if an example is required of the way in which he exemplified this *agape*, it is perhaps found most characteristically in the acted parable of John 13 when Jesus, revealing the love which he had to his own friends, rose from supper and took a basin and began to wash their feet. 'You call me Master and Lord. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an *example* (literally an outline sketch), that you should do as I have done to you.' I doubt if anywhere in the New Testament we come nearer to what may be described as the style, the pattern, the shape, the form of Jesus' humanity than in this record. To go right down into a situation, to pour oneself out in sympathetic identification, to assume the weight of the weary world, this is *agape*. And that Jesus was the supreme revelation of *agape* few would wish to deny.

Yet, in a strange way, this approach, though widely approved, fails to make any strong impact upon the minds and consciences of our contemporaries. We have renounced Idealism. We are suspicious of any *general* patterns for human living. We doubt if it is useful, or even possible, to fasten upon a single word such as love or reconciliation or humility or sacrifice and say, 'That is the essential quality of a truly human life.' Ideals, values, virtues seem too vague, too abstract. Instead we look for *action*. We want to see what happens when a man wrestles with himself, his society, his material environment. We at least feel a certain sympathy with Sartre when he claims that 'Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself'. So in relation to Jesus we do not find it very meaningful to talk about his coming down and becoming incarnate in a fleshly body in order to reveal some pre-existent value such as love or reconciliation. Rather, we want to hear about his struggles towards identity, his temptations to follow some alternative way to that which he in fact took, his conflicts with the social prejudices and passions of his time, his actions in relation to individuals and to crowds, his struggles with the incidence of disappointment, disillusionment and despair. In other words, we look not for an ideal hu-

manity but for contextual man, not for patterned humanity but for man in action, not for essential humanity but for existential man, not for rounded humanity but for man on the edge of nothingness.

And I do not think it is merely wishful thinking to say that this is what the writers of the Synoptic Gospels in particular are concerned to give us. I admit that they move within the framework of what might be called a patterned myth and I have no wish to deny that this is an essential part of the Christian revelation. But in the forefront of their presentation we are given a series of vivid stories revealing Jesus the man, adventuring, struggling, challenging, comforting, wrestling with forces, confronting the void, daring in action, inflexible in purpose, revealing the nature of true manhood by actually realizing it within the particular situation and context to which he belonged.

#### IV

At the time of the preparation of this paper, David Jenkins' Bampton Lectures *The Glory of Man* had not appeared in published form. Having now had opportunity to read them I see them as an outstanding example of the first approach to which I have referred. The author's central category is 'personalness'. Jesus Christ is 'the definition of the nature of personalness'. He 'shows that a truly human person, a real man, is an individual who is wholly and consistently open to all the possibilities of materiality and history as they impinge upon him, to all the demands and possibilities of other persons as he encounters them, and to the reality of God which is both involved in materiality, historicity and other persons and also exists independently and transcendentally. Such a real man has never yet existed save in the defining case of Jesus Christ, but this is the reality of which all men to some extent partake, for which all men are destined and in which all men will find the complete fulfilment of their existence' (pp. 91f.).

This is finely said. It is the approach of the philosopher who is vividly aware of the problems and perplexities with which contemporary thinkers are concerned. Yet over against such an approach I must set that of the artist who feels on his pulses the agony of a world which is beginning to say not simply that God is dead but that Man is dead. His own reaction is intense, broken in form, comparable to a cry of dereliction. To choose one example only I take David Gascoyne's *Ecce Homo*:

Whose is this horrifying face,  
This putrid flesh, discoloured, flayed,  
Fed on by flies, scorched by the sun?  
Whose are these hollow red-filmed eyes  
And thorn-spiked head and spear-stuck side?  
Behold the Man: He is Man's Son.

Forget the legend, tear the decent veil  
That cowardice or interest devised  
To make their mortal enemy a friend,  
To hide the bitter truth all His wounds tell,  
Lest the great scandal be no more disguised:  
He is in agony till the world's end,

And we must never sleep during that time!  
He is suspended on the cross-tree now  
And we are onlookers at the crime,  
Callous contemporaries of the slow  
Torture of God. Here is the hill  
Made ghastly by His spattered blood

Whereon He hangs and suffers still:  
See, the centurions wear riding-boots,  
Black shirts and badges and peaked caps,  
Greet one another with raised-arm salutes;  
They have cold eyes, unsmiling lips;  
Yet these His brothers know not what they do.

And on His either side hang dead  
A labourer and a factory hand,  
Or one is maybe a lynched Jew  
And one a Negro or a Red,  
Coolie or Ethiopian, Irishman,  
Spaniard or German democrat.

Behind His lolling head the sky  
Glares like a fiery cataract  
Red with the murders of two thousand years  
Committed in His name and by  
Crusaders, Christian warriors  
Defending faith and property.

Amid the plain beneath His transfixed hands,  
Exuding darkness as indelible  
As guilty stains, fanned by funereal  
And lurid airs, besieged by drifting sands  
And clefted landslides our about-to-be  
Bombed and abandoned cities stand.

He who wept for Jerusalem  
Now sees his prophecy extend  
Across the greatest cities of the world,  
A guilty panic reason cannot stem  
Rising to raze them all as He foretold;  
And He must watch this drama to the end.<sup>1</sup>

This also is a revelation of Man. True personalness: the struggle and the agony in facing actual situations. Within this dialectic we still struggle forward to reach a deeper understanding of the mysterious potentialities of this creature whom we call Man.

<sup>1</sup> From *Collected Poems*, by David Gascoyne, published by Oxford University Press. Quoted by permission.

## JESUS, THE REVELATION OF GOD

*H. W. Montefiore*

I SHOULD like to begin by saying that I conceive that my title is different in meaning from the title from which Dr Dillistone spoke this morning. My title is 'Jesus, The Revelation of God'. Dr Dillistone's title was 'Jesus, The Revelation of Man'. I do not conceive the revelation of God to be identical with the revelation of Man. That the two are connected is of course true; and unless Jesus did disclose manhood, he could not, to us, disclose the nature and character of God. But this is not to say that theology is identical with anthropology. It might seem extraordinary that it is necessary to make such a statement among Christian theologians had it not been the case that the positivist thesis of Feuerbach has become so popular – I will not say among Modern Churchmen, but among 'radical' churchmen.

Yet even to make such a statement is to be aware of the immensity of the issues which are raised as soon as the question is asked: How can Jesus be the revelation of God? In the first place we must begin by asking: what do we mean by Jesus? Do we mean his teaching and/or his work and/or his character? Can we even with any degree of certainty speak of these as historically knowable? Do we simply mean by Jesus the person who was conceived and born in first-century Palestine and who died there some thirty (or was it thirty-three?) years later? Or do we include the Jesus whom the disciples were convinced had been raised from the dead, and who had appeared to his friends? In any case can we sum up the meaning of a whole life? Do not people alter? – and Jesus seems to have altered more than most if we compare the first thirty years of his life with the last three. And as we have asked questions about Jesus, so, too, we must ask questions about God. Do we really know who God is, or what God is like? Can we make meaningful statements about the nature or character of God? Is human language capable of such significant usage? Do we know what God



is like, and then assert that Jesus reveals him? If so, there is hardly a need of any revelation, if we knew it all before. Or do we know nothing about God, until we find it disclosed in Jesus? If so, how can we be sure that it is God who is revealed and not someone or something else? In any case, how can a human person possibly disclose God? Let us assume, for the purposes of argument, that while God is greater than we conceive, we may picture him as transcendent Being in whom all things consist. How could a single human person possibly disclose transcendent and immanent Being? How can the particular disclose the universal (if God is universal)? How can the finite reveal the infinite (if God is infinite)? Indeed, how can any being disclose another unless it is identical with it?

I could prolong this list of questions almost indefinitely, questions well known to you, questions requiring as much a philosophical as a theological treatment. I do not intend to pursue them now, for to do that would require a systematic treatment of christology. I shall attempt to be more practical. The second half of these lectures are devoted to 'Jesus' significance for today'; and I shall try to keep within my terms of reference. His significance, today and always, is bound to be different for different people. This is a Conference for Modern Churchmen; and I shall therefore attempt to search with you for his significance for modern churchmen, rather than for philosophers or apologists or systematic theologians, or even for Hindus or humanists.

I am one of those who feel able to affirm, with a sufficient degree of probability, that Jesus did do and say certain particular things, and that certain particular things were said and done to him. Although the primitive church has undeniably left its stamp upon the records, yet the character of the person bursts through chapter and verse, and (so it seems to me) the techniques of criticism enhance rather than diminish the main points of the Gospel narratives. Let that be as it may: for the purposes of this lecture I am content to ask the question which is characteristic of the new quest for the historical Jesus – What manner of man must he have been who gave rise to these accounts of what he said and did? I say 'what manner of *man*'. I take it as our starting point that Jesus was truly and fully a man, '*totus in nostris*'. It is not conceivable for me that the nature of manhood and the nature of Godhead should so co-exist within one human person that one action might disclose his humanity, and another his divinity. This is traditional orthodoxy,

as expressed in the famous letter of St Leo to Flavian in 449: 'His fleshly nativity is a manifestation of human nature; his birth from a virgin is a sign of his divine power.' And again, 'To hunger and thirst and grow tired and sleep is obviously human. But to satisfy five thousand men with five loaves, and to give living water to the Samaritan woman, to walk on the back of the sea and to rebuke a tempest and still the rising of the sea, without any ambiguity is divine.' It is not unambiguous for me! Perhaps we need para-normal categories as well as normal categories if we are to explain the life of Jesus without remainder, but if Jesus is wholly a man, all his life must in principle be explicable in human terms, and I do not even exempt his survival after death and his post mortem appearances from this general proposition.

And so we are faced with two questions – how can a particular man possibly reveal God, and if he can, how can we know it? The only form of knowledge here is faith; faith activated in commitment, based on reason and quickened through experience. It is not my job this evening to attempt an anatomy of faith – others have done that far more competently. But we must be careful to define, at least provisionally, *fides in quo*, faith in what or in whom. Perhaps by the end what we mean by faith will be clarified and sharpened; but at the outset let us call it faith in God, the transcendent Being in whom we live and move and have our being, who is disclosed in the human personality of Jesus. Now this disclosure may be sufficient for our needs as fellow human beings, but it cannot be absolute in itself. To identify Jesus with God is to make him an idol. It is to reduce God to human size. Even to speak of God as a person can be gravely misleading. Not that he is sub-personal, but, as it were, he transcends human personality. Personal categories are the highest that we have, and therefore it must be right to speak of him in these; but to regard God as a person and no more is to confuse the creature with the Creator. Even to use personal terms analogically about God presupposes, however, a similarity between God and humanity, a similarity essential for the very concept of Incarnation. Theologically this is expressed by saying that man was created in the image of God, a statement that is badly in need of demythologization. We mean by it that man resembles God in as much as responsibility, communicability and intelligence are inherent in the nature of human personality. In as much as these characteristics are inherent in human personality, all human beings to a certain extent disclose God; that is to say, human beings have

certain characteristics that make them similar to God in certain respects. This sounds a very qualified statement, and it is indeed meant to be! The question next arises: in what particular way does Jesus of Nazareth disclose God? If he is fully a man, does he disclose God in the same way as other men? Or is his disclosure unique in the sense that it is effected by some fresh mode of presence? Traditional orthodoxy would answer Yes to this question; and orthodox theologians would say that whereas God is present by grace in all men, he is present by nature in the hypostatic union of the one person Jesus Christ. We have already found ourselves unable to accept this way of thinking, because the very idea of a hypostatic union of two natures is foreign to present ways of thinking. We are disposed therefore to assert that the revelation of God in Jesus is unique, in the sense that God acted in Jesus as fully as possible within the medium of human personality. Jesus as a human person was perfectly obedient to his Father's will – that is what we mean by the perfection of his humanity – and so God acted in a unique way through him, and so he is 'Son of God'. Others have only approximated to this response. Here is something we accept (or do not accept) through faith. It is a judgement value which we make from our reading of Jesus' life, or by experiencing his presence and then identifying this presence with the historical Jesus. And so while God is present in Jesus in the same kind of mode as he is present to all men, the difference of Jesus' response makes the presence of God in him unique. It follows therefore that Jesus' human character discloses God. He is so perfectly obedient to his Father's will that he is described (and probably described himself) as the Son of his Father. This does not mean, and did not mean, that he is physically derived from his Father, as a human son carries the genes of his paternal progenitor. It denotes rather a personal relationship of unity between them unique as that of 'an only-begotten Son'. It denotes an identity of character (in so far as human personality can resemble divine nature). It signifies unity of nature and function rather than any derivation or procreation. The *homoousios* is misleading as a literal statement of this relationship, because (for me at any rate) it is not meaningful to say that Jesus is of one substance with the Father, for I cannot think either of God as substance or of two substances in one person. At the same time the *homoousios* is essential for what it signifies – that the moving pattern of divine activity which we see in creation and in the work of the Holy Spirit is precisely the same as that which we see

disclosed in the human personality of Jesus of Nazareth.

If we are to distinguish the self-disclosure of God in Jesus from his general self-disclosure in creation, or his more particular revelation in human beings on whom he has stamped his image, we must consider the kinds of ways in which God could have disclosed himself in Jesus. It might be, of course, that the teaching of Jesus alone should be considered as divine. Whatever we may think about the person of Christ, we may perhaps believe that the Sermon on the Mount is divine. Indeed, it has sometimes been cast in the teeth of Modern Churchmen (most unfairly, as I believe) that at any rate in the past they have accepted the human perfection of Jesus and his divine teaching, but they have rejected the divinity of his person. Now I suppose that it is not inconceivable that a human being could have been granted a special insight into the mind of God and that he could express with divine authority the teaching of God on belief and behaviour suited to the understanding of his hearers. Such a concept is not in itself impossible. But when we consider the actual teaching of Jesus, the idea founders. For the ethical teaching of Jesus is based primarily on the *imitatio Dei*: 'Be merciful,' he taught, 'as your heavenly Father is merciful.' We must assume that he practised what he taught – for how else could he have been perfect? If so, then he must have perfectly imitated his heavenly Father. Now a person who perfectly imitated his Heavenly Father would have been transparently obedient to his will. He would have been uniquely open to the promptings of the Spirit – he would have been what we mean when we speak of Jesus as the Son of God. And so when we come to examine the *content* of Jesus' ethics, we find that we cannot logically separate the divine nature of his teaching from that of his person.

A further possibility must be examined. Might we not say that we should not look for God's self-disclosure in the life of Jesus, but only in his death? Some theologians seem to hold that we can know nothing or next to nothing about the character and teaching and activity of Jesus (a view from which I dissent on critical grounds); and they go on to affirm that it is almost doctrinally necessary that this should be so. For Jesus, they say, is the Divine Incognito, and it is irrelevant what he said or did or did not do. There was, they affirm, absolutely nothing remarkable about his life and his death. He lived, as many others had lived, both as a private citizen in Galilee and as an itinerant prophet on a large

mission: he died, as thousands of other Jews had died, on a cross of wood. What alone distinguishes Jesus is that God raised him from the dead. That is the starting point of Christianity: this alone shows God's activity, justifying man by vindicating his Son's sacrificial death. Without the resurrection Jesus would have been just another name in the catalogue of Jewish martyrs: with the Resurrection, Jesus is the Divine Event which discloses the nature of God's unmerited grace and love. Now this is a very respectable position; and yet for myself I find it most unsatisfactory; and that for three main reasons. The first one consists of Christian experience. In fact men and women down the ages have found that the character of Jesus (as disclosed up to the time of and including his death) has been as it were a window through to God, a mirror in which they can see not merely the reflection of God's character, but his real nature focussed down to human size. This experience by itself would not be conclusive, but it is supported by the nature of the Risen Lord, as he impressed himself upon those to whom he appeared. They knew that he was the same person as he whom they had known during his lifetime. His character was the same; and so, if the character of the Risen Lord shows us God in action, so, too, must the character of the Incarnate Lord. But it might be said that his character is irrelevant: all that matters is that he was raised from the dead. Such a view does violence to the ways in which God's grace always works. It does not work irresistibly, but with the co-operation of the creature. There would be some, like myself, who hold that the Resurrection appearances of Jesus were natural, if paranormal, events; there will be others who regard them as supernatural. Whatever view we may take of them, we cannot separate the power of God from the character in whom he is at work. To do so would be to have a sub-personal concept of God. And so I conclude that we must examine the human character of Jesus, so far as we can do so, to give us a clearer picture of the nature of the invisible God. It is not enough to say that Jesus shows us that God is love, and leave it at that. Indeed, if we attend to the New Testament evidence, we may find it necessary to revise some of our traditional concepts of the character of God.

First, an attempt must be made to distinguish between those human characteristics of Jesus which are common to mankind, those which are typical to the Jewish people of his day, and those which seem to me idiosyncratic. For example, Jesus was subject to continual temptation. 'The Devil,' we are informed, 'departed from

him for a season.' But temptation is part of the human lot. Temptation is the stress which arises between the discordant claims of duty and desire; and human instincts and affections are such that men are bound to be tempted. No significance should therefore be attached to the fact that Jesus suffered temptation, beyond the fact that he was a human being: if there had been no evidence of temptation, then this would be a matter of comment. Or again, Jesus in the gospels on occasion professes ignorance. 'Of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son but only the Father' (Mark 13.36). We need not, of course, attribute these exact words to the historical Jesus; but we are bound to ask – what kind of a man was it to whom these words were attributed? Obviously someone to whom it was proper to attribute limitation of knowledge. But this again is part and parcel of the human condition. Indeed, it would only be noteworthy if the gospels attributed to Jesus omniscience and infallibility. It is inherent in humanity to be limited in knowledge and understanding, since the very idea of personality implies limitation. It would be wrong, therefore, to see any other significance in Jesus' limitation of knowledge than that he was properly a man. Let me take a third and last illustration of these characteristics of Jesus which are common to humanity; and it is this. Jesus had friends. The death of Lazarus, we are told, brought tears to his eyes. He made friends with women, he made friends with men and with children. But there is nothing remarkable about this. It is the friendless man who is noteworthy. To be able to engage in personal relationships, and to make friends readily, is a sign of proper humanity and normal maturity. No special significance should be attached to it, other than that Jesus was a mature man.

Next we must consider those characteristics which Jesus has in common with the Jews of his time. For example, he seems to have been, from the evidence of the gospels, perhaps lacking in a sense of humour, judging by our modern standards. Attempts to find humour in the gospels have generally failed. Wit, yes; but humour, no. Yet one only has to read in the Jewish literature of the time to see that this lack was, alas, then a national characteristic. The genius of Aristophanes did not flourish among the Hebrew nation. They were given other excellencies instead. Or again, there are not many signs that Jesus enjoyed particularly advanced aesthetic sensibilities. Far more has been made of the meagre references to the 'fowls of the air' and the 'lilies of the field' than is warranted by

their context. The sad fact remains that the Jewish nation as a whole was singularly lacking at that time in aesthetic sensibilities. Their pictorial imagery, for example, was never visual, or Isaiah could hardly have described as he did such mythical beings as the cherubim. The fact that Jesus does not seem to have shown many aesthetic sensibilities only goes to show that he was a Jew of the first century. The same conclusion can be drawn both from the nationalistic slant of his theology and from the paradoxical nature of his thinking. The Jews of the first century thought vividly and intuitively rather than logically and systematically. No conclusions should therefore be drawn from the fact that Jesus is never portrayed as a systematic teacher; this was inevitable in a first century Jew. Again, his theology is dominated by God's purpose for Israel. The other nations only enter into his thinking at one remove. The only significance that can be attached to this is that Jesus thought like a first-century Jew.

I pass then to those characteristics of Jesus that seem to differentiate him, as a man, from the other men of his time, and which give a special flavour and quality to his human personality. Here, of course, I must be personal. Although I shall try to keep strictly to the evidence (such as it is), I cannot give more than a personal and individual reference to my conclusions. I can only speak of what seems to *me* especially to differentiate Jesus of Nazareth; and leave you to consider whether or not you agree with me.

I suppose that two of the most striking facts about the life of Jesus are (a) that he remained unmarried and (b) that for thirty years or so he lived as a private civilian before he was baptized in the Jordan and began his public mission. First let us consider his celibacy. (Apart from the Essenes, celibacy as a vocation was unknown in Israel; and it is hard to see how fanatical Essene asceticism influenced one who taught love of one's enemies and who was dubbed 'a glutton and a winebibber'.) But, although celibacy was most unusual in his day it seems to have aroused little interest in ours – except perhaps among such as D. H. Lawrence. Marriage (at what we might consider an early age) was all but universal in the Middle East of Jesus' time. Why then did he remain unmarried?<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Professor D. E. Nineham, explaining that no biography of Jesus is possible, appends a note that 'on these grounds, if no others,' he dissociates himself from speculation on this question (p. 52). It is not clear if he believes it to be an open question whether Jesus was married. Nor is it clear why he considers speculation about Jesus' attitudes 'unlikely to be fruitful': he himself 'prophecies' about the character of Jesus (pp. 62f.).

Let this question be asked at the purely human level, although even at this level we can receive no certain reply. It would be possible to suggest that Jesus did not marry because he wished to be absolutely free to do the will of God wherever this might lead him, without the encumbrance of a family. Or it might be said that Jesus did not desire close and intimate relations with any one person in order that he might be available for all. (He must, however, have had particularly close relationships with his family and in particular with his mother, until he emancipated himself, as the gospels show, from their emotional attachment.) Both these arguments might properly explain Jesus' celibacy during his public ministry. Neither are relevant to that far longer period of his life when he was living as a private citizen. Until he was in his thirties he was an obscure and humble manual worker and there is no hint during all those years that he was conscious either of his vocation as Messiah or Son of God or of his need to be available to all. We must therefore look elsewhere for an explanation of his celibacy. Men usually remain unmarried for three reasons: either because they cannot afford to marry or there are no girls to marry (neither of these factors need have deterred Jesus); or because it is inexpedient for them to marry in the light of their vocation (we have already ruled this out during the 'hidden years' of Jesus' life); or because they are homosexual in nature, in as much as women hold no special attraction for them. This homosexual explanation is one which we must not ignore.<sup>2</sup> According to the gospels, women were his friends but it is men whom he is said to have loved. Possibly the hearer may shrink from this idea in disgust. If so, let him consider that these are the very same emotions with which Jews of Jesus' day would have received the idea that the Messiah of Judah died a criminal's death upon a Roman cross. In other words, this possible explanation of Jesus' celibate status shows in him what we find elsewhere in his life. Jesus was identified from conception to death with the 'outsider'. Whether or not we accept the so-called Virgin Birth, no one can deny that Jesus was conceived out of wedlock.

<sup>2</sup> The furore that followed the sensational publicity which the national press accorded this speculation prompts me to add a note to what I said. The word 'homosexual', when applied to human nature, does not contain or imply any moral connotation whatever. It is simply descriptive of a certain type of personality. It in no way implies or attributes any kind of sinfulness to Jesus. As readers of this lecture will notice, I have been careful to stress (because I happen to believe) the human perfection of Jesus and his entire obedience to his Father's will.



It is not for nothing that the author of St Matthew's Gospel includes Tamar in his genealogy. All the synoptic gospels show Jesus in close relationship with the 'outsiders' and the unloved. Publicans and sinners, prostitutes and criminals are among his acquaintances and companions. If Jesus were homosexual in nature (and if this is the true explanation of his celibate state) then this would be further evidence of God's self-identification with those who are unacceptable to the upholders of 'The Establishment' and social conventions. The character of Jesus here discloses an important aspect of the nature of God, befriending the friendless, and identifying himself with the underprivileged.

I turn next to the baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan, for this was plainly the chief turning point in his human life. From that point onwards, the character and circumstances of his life radically altered. It is not often realized that, so far as we can recapture it, this event held for Jesus most of the psychological features which we usually associate with conversion. There was clairaudience and clairvoyance, a call to mission, the realization of a new relationship with God after an admission of guilt (in this case, presumably, corporate guilt, for the baptism of John was 'for the remission of sins'). There was a radically new way of life, accompanied by a vivid consciousness of the power of the Holy Spirit. All these are customarily connected with the psychological phenomenon of conversion. If this was the turning point of Jesus' human life, it must surely have some special significance in his disclosure of God's nature. William James classified the religious temperament in two types – the once-born and the twice-born. Jesus plainly falls into the twice-born. It suggests at least a change of direction. When we assert the human perfection of Jesus we mean that whatever he did, he was always completely obedient to his Father's will; but the turning point of his baptism suggests that there was a change of direction. Is it, I wonder, absolutely fanciful to suggest that this mirrors the nature of God? For example, are we really to imagine a plan of cosmic evolution conceived and foreseen by God from eternity, which he watches unfold with what (as a human being) I can only imagine is a mixture of boredom and impatience? Are we to imagine the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world? Or is it more characteristic of God's nature to be capable of a complete change of direction, in evolution, in self-disclosure, in anything? Is it entirely fanciful to see this mirrored in the sudden change in the tenor of Jesus' life? I am groping here; to change the

metaphor, trying to break fresh ground. Perhaps the whirlwind activity of the ministry coming after the peaceful hidden years discloses that God works with special meaning in short bursts of activity, whether in evolution or in other ways. We might instance, for example, what Professor Jaspers called the 'axial age of the eighth century BC'.

Of course the fact that most of Jesus' life was spent in humble obscurity must be significant. Theologians usually so concentrate on the whirlwind years of the ministry as to ignore completely the far longer 'hidden years' in Nazareth. Jesus does not even possess the glamour of poverty – he seems to have belonged to a comfortable middle class home with good connections. I cannot but think that this self-effacingness is the most important single human characteristic of Jesus. And what of the ministry, when he had become famous and the crowds followed him? He chose for himself the enigmatic anonymous title 'Son of Man', and he claimed that the role of the Son of Man was not to be served but to serve. Even here Jesus pointed from himself to his Heavenly Father. 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness' was the burden of his message. The Messiah rode into his capital city – on a donkey. In pointing to himself, paradoxically he pointed away from himself. The Fourth Evangelist faithfully portrays his attitude with the words: 'If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing: it is my Father who glorifies me' (John 8.54).

This self-effacingness seems to me to disclose something most important about the nature of God. Like Father, like Son. The nature of God himself is to be self-effacing. 'Ever since the creation of the world,' wrote St Paul, 'his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.' But Paul was not infallible, and Paul here was wrong. His eternal power and deity are not clearly perceived. Indeed they are so unclearly perceived that many cannot perceive them at all. The marks of the Creator cannot be distinguished from the substance of the creature. His providence cannot be separated from the natural chain of cause and effect. His grace cannot be divorced from human response. The working of his Holy Spirit cannot be distinguished from the operation of our own personalities. Jesus' disclosure of God shows that in his very nature God is self-effacing, whereas Christian orthodoxy has thought of him as the opposite; majestic, glorious and triumphal.

In the time remaining I can do no more than glance at other

striking characteristics of Jesus' human personality, as portrayed in the gospels. One of these is surely his willingness to put his fate into the hands of others. Admittedly there are times when he seemed to have kept out of the limelight because 'his hour has not yet come'; and the reasons for secrecy in his mission (if secrecy there was) are not entirely clear. But it would seem that, if he did take steps deliberately to avoid imprisonment earlier in his ministry, this was not so much a deliberate attempt to plan his own destiny as a prudent refusal to stick his neck out before he had had a real chance to say what he thought he ought to say. When he journeyed to Jerusalem for the last time, he seemed to be aware of a coming disaster which he did nothing to avert. Whatever actual historical events lie behind the stories of his arrest, his trials before the Sanhedrin and before Pilate, it seems clear that Jesus made no attempt to defend himself against either arrest or sentence or execution. It is hard to understand how the present gospel stories could have come to assume their present form unless this was the case. And yet, as has often been remarked, although Jesus put himself in the hands of others, his character is such that he seemed to remain master of events. For example, in the trial scene with Pilate, although the Governor had power over him, it was he and not Jesus who seems to have been the accused. Surely here, too, we have a disclosure of the nature of God. His providence has often been imagined as though it were a supernatural over-ruling of men's wills. But the divine self-disclosure in Jesus leads us to the conclusion that in fact God puts himself into our hands, and man makes his own providence, and by so doing man reveals God as the true master of events.

What are we to make of the fact that Jesus suffered? Because he died a remarkably short time after his crucifixion, we may assume that he was suffering, not only from the wounds of his passion but also from a state of acute surgical shock caused by his temptation in Gethsemane and his betrayal by his friend. The cry of dereliction from the Cross, together with the earlier account of *haimatidrosis*, makes it clear that Jesus suffered spiritual and emotional agony as well as physical torment. No doubt suffering is part of the human condition, and no one can escape from it completely; but it seems to have been part of Jesus' self-consciousness that he must needs specially suffer. Again and again this thought appears. His suffering seems to be not so much an unfortunate necessity, as buried deep in the heart of things. It is unthinkable that God should be

incarnate upon earth without fulfilling this destiny of suffering.

Just what this discloses about the nature of God is perhaps hard to define with precision. But one thing is clear: we cannot write off the suffering of Jesus as part of his human nature, and therefore as not disclosing anything about his Heavenly Father. For Jesus has a special vocation to suffer, and when suffering comes, he accepts it as such. It would seem to me to cut right across the orthodox concept of the impassible God. The Greeks thought they knew what God was like – impassible – and they tried to fit in with this God's self-disclosure in Jesus. But we do not know what God is like. Contemporary Process Theology would seem closer to God's historical self-disclosure than orthodox theories of impassibility. And perhaps too we should question whether God's nature is bliss and beatitude unimaginable. His self-disclosure in Jesus suggests that if human analogies are used, they should include pain and grief as well as joy and bliss.

The two chief activities of Jesus during his public ministry were teaching and the performance of mighty works. Both these give us insights into the nature of God. First, let us briefly consider the character and method of his teaching. He spoke with immense authority, but he refused to disclose his credentials and the source of his authority. He never gave people a 'hand-out'. He appealed to the natural instincts and responses of men, and built upon them. 'Whom do you say was friend to the man who fell among thieves?' he asked. His ethical teaching was quite different from that of the Pharisees and the Scribes. He gave dramatic illustrations of extreme situations, or he simply emphasized the necessity for the interior disposition of the heart, and then left people to make up their own minds – 'Who made me a divider among you?' If this be the mode of his teaching, is it, I wonder, altogether fanciful to see here, too, a disclosure of his Father's nature? God does not disclose himself to us or teach us about himself through a neat blue-print by means of hierarchical structures of authority; but rather he gives us freedom to make up our own minds and convinces us by his own intrinsic authority.

When we come to consider Jesus' acts of power, we are in difficulties because we may not know what to make of the miracles in the gospels. We may feel that we should distinguish between the reasons why Jesus did mighty works, and the reasons why the Evangelists imply that he did. We may also feel the need to distinguish between the stories as told and the events as they actually

took place. If, however, we look at the effect of what Jesus did upon people (and one could hardly deny that Jesus did some very mysterious things), then the chief effect of his mighty works would seem to be amazement. The same could be said of his Resurrection. 'What manner of man is this!' people exclaimed. And if we went further and asked ourselves what this discloses about the nature of God, I think it would be fair to say it reveals the divine unexpectedness and power; and we might add that God never uses power except with a purpose.

The most striking perhaps of all Jesus' human characteristics is his utter obedience to his Father's will. This comes out again and again in his teaching: it comes out in his life and it shines out luminously clear in his death. His love of his Father means the consecration of all that he has and all that he is to his Father's will. Indeed his obedience is so simple and straightforward that, having stated it quite simply and straightforwardly, there is little more to be said about it. What does this disclose of his Father's nature? Presumably it shows us something of the constancy of God. We have already had cause to note his unexpectedness and his willingness to change direction. These are concerned with the adaptation of means to ends. Neither are opposed to constancy; for constancy refers to the divine will for himself and for others. Popular devotion has often portrayed God as easily swayed by our prayers, willing to reward especially those who offer him their devotion. The self-disciplined obedience of Jesus suggests that his heavenly Father is utterly constant and concentrated on his own ends, and that he will not be deflected from them by us or by any other creature.

Finally I must mention the love of Jesus. As we have seen, Jesus was utterly devoted to his heavenly Father and lived out in his own life the first great commandment. What about his fellow-men? Jesus seems to have recognized the priority of the second great commandment, but it was a priority of secondary importance. The phrase 'man for others' to describe Jesus seems quite unjustified in view of the gospel evidence. Jesus was rather 'The man for God'. His first thought for others was that they should love God. It is in the epistles and not in the gospels that Jesus is described as disclosing the love of God, because it is the epistles that interpret God's loving action in coming to man's aid. Certainly in the gospels Jesus manifested love, but it was very different from what is generally supposed. It included a certain ruthlessness in his care and concern,

a willingness to condemn not individuals but classes, a hatred of bigotry and pretence and indeed a certain intolerance of these things. It included not only uncomplaining martyrdom but also the violence displayed in the cleansing of the temple. Of course we cannot know the degree of historical accuracy in these accounts; but we can ask ourselves: 'What manner of man was this about whom these stories were told?' I myself find it hard to ascribe to the Evangelists or to later tradition all those parts of the gospels which show a darker and more sombre side. We cannot simply discard those portions of the gospels which are unpalatable. Jesus discloses the love of God, coming to the aid of men, but it is a love quite unsentimental, more ruthless and impassioned than the kind of love to which we are used. And surely here too is mirrored the nature of his Father in heaven. For there is a kind of ruthlessness in creation, so that in the slow development of evolution whole species can lapse or be destroyed, and individuals suffer undeserved pain and suffering. I am not suggesting that an unblinkered assessment of Jesus' character would solve for us the age-old problem of evil; but I do suggest that we may be able to get thereby a clearer view of the nature of his Heavenly Father. The old-fashioned picture of the angry Father appeased by the death of his loving Son does not really accord with the gospel; and it is more natural to assume that the Son's character does not contradict the Father's but reveals it.

It is time that I attempted to draw together these remarks about Jesus as the revelation of God. I realize that the second half of my remarks has become highly personal, as I have attempted to comment on those aspects of Jesus' life and character which seem to me of special significance for us today. I do not for one moment suggest anything approaching Jesuolatry. But I do suggest that for Christians the character of Jesus, his human character, must be taken most seriously because it is a lens through which we can see straight through to God. I do not believe that we know all about God and that we can check off our answers by using the crib given us in Jesus Christ. Rather, I believe that Jesus disclosed to us what is always true but what would otherwise be obscure to us – the nature and activity of God. I further suggest that if we take his human character really seriously we may find insight into the divine nature and activity which may be very different from the conventional dogmas of traditional orthodoxy. Instead of an impassible God, we find the one who is afflicted in his creation's afflictions. Instead of the God who will change his mind when we pray, we find the God who is unchanging

in his purposes. Instead of the God of majesty and glory, we find the God whose nature is to be self-effacing. Instead of the God who has laid down laws of behaviour and dogmas of belief we find the God who is enigmatic about authority and who leaves his creation to make their ethical decisions. Instead of the sentimental God of love we find one who can be ruthless and even angry. Instead of the God of unchanging order and predictability we find a God who can act unexpectedly and even as it were change direction. We find times of special activity. We discover that the loving God seems to identify himself with the 'outsider' and that so far from imposing his irresistible providence upon the world, he permits the world to decide its own providence, and as it were puts himself in the power of the world, allowing himself to be found as much in its rejection as in its acceptance of him. If my reading of Jesus' character be correct, these are some of the ways in which Jesus is the revelation of God and these are some aspects of his significance for today.

## JESUS' SIGNIFICANCE TODAY - ONE PHILOSOPHER'S VIEW

*L. A. Reid*

I MUST begin by making some distinctions and offering some explanations and even apologies. The title I have been given is 'Jesus' (or Jesus Christ's?) significance today - one philosopher's view'. In the first place, it certainly is the view of *one* philosopher. I speak only for myself, although I know some other philosophers who would agree with me. And, philosophers apart, much of what I shall say is in effect very much what a great many of my academic friends would say. Yet, on the other hand, although my views may coincide, to some extent, with views widely held by other people, the opinions which I shall personally express are thoughts worked out painstakingly in the course of a lifetime.

And here I must make an apology for being, for a moment, autobiographical. I was born in a Scottish Presbyterian manse and I have (although of course I am not a trained theologian) been exposed to religion and theological argument throughout the whole of my life. (At the age of six or so I was fascinated by the words in theological books in my father's library, and by the noises of theological argument. I heard the words 'higher criticism', 'modernist' said with a vicious emphasis!) I have been 'inside' Christianity, have been sympathetic to it, sceptical about it and have written a good many articles and several books in the attempt to formulate my own beliefs and disbeliefs about religion. I have been in the Church, I left it, came back to it and left it again, and have now moved so far that I am on the other side of the frontier from traditional Christianity. I say all this because if, at points, I seem to you to be cold and external, this is not because of lack of sympathy and concern, but rather the opposite. I beg you to believe that what I now think is the result of a life-long inner dialectic. (And not inner only: I have the good luck to have had as friends a good many distinguished theologians.) In general, I have approached Christian theology with, at times, an almost desperate desire to understand orthodoxy.



The title says 'one philosopher', and I have been saying that it is only *one* philosopher speaking. But if the emphasis be on the word 'philosopher', then one has to say that the problem of Jesus' significance today is not primarily a problem for philosophy – though in talking about the significance of Jesus many assumptions are constantly being made which it could be the function of philosophy to examine.

Again, the title is ambiguous. Since I am a philosopher, you obviously do not expect a sort of *sociological* investigation into what *is* Jesus' significance today for a large variety of people – 'Christians' of various kinds, as well as post-Christians and non-Christians – a survey which, one guesses, would have to report a vast variety of answers. But 'one philosopher' could not intelligently express his opinions about a proper question for him – 'What *ought* to be the significance of Jesus today' – without reference to what *some*, very important, people, the theologians and other Christian scholars, have thought the significance of Jesus Christ actually to be. So I had better explain what I shall try to do.

I shall begin by referring as briefly as possible to historico-theological Christianity and referring to it in a critical way. Here I advisedly use the word 'refer', for we all know that the arguments within, and for and against, historico-theological Christianity are complex in the extreme. To do more than refer, to begin to argue, is to start a process almost endless. In any case, my purpose in this short paper could not be to argue in any scholarly way with the experts who are here, even were I fully competent to do so. And in any case, the historico-theological questions are referred to only as a background for the main question. The main question is whether a religion of Jesus Christ, whose simplest creed affirms beliefs in certain historical occurrences which have been and can be questioned, and which again insists on the affirmation, as articles of belief, of theological propositions which can be and have been disputed endlessly – whether such a religion is soundly based and likely to continue to be accepted. Is it satisfactory even for the believing Christian, and is it likely to have persuasive power for the increasing number of those who are outside Christianity? There is nothing new in these questions – or in my answers; but old questions have to be asked again in new contexts.

That is negative. On the positive side I want to suggest that possibly even for the Christian, certainly for the post-Christian, for the non-Christian with what I may call, rather vaguely, a 'religious'

outlook, and for others as well, there may be a much more direct basis of belief and action.

Negatively, then, I do not think that the basis of the fullest religious life can in the end be dependent upon a *credo* which includes, as an essential part of it, affirmations about historical events or about metaphysical-theological beliefs. These may be very important constructions, but constructions they are. And if they have helped many people, they can hinder others insuperably. Positively, if the divine *is*, it impinges, and we discover it, here and now, in our own experience. Or that is the kind of position which I shall try to defend.

I shall be referring, when I speak of 'Christianity' in what immediately follows, to the main tradition of theological Christianity, of the thought and belief broadly called 'orthodoxy'. It is the Christianity determined by the Chalcedonian Council. We 'confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the same of a rational soul and body, of one substance with the Father according to His Godhead, and the same of one substance with us according to His manhood, in all things like to us apart from sin, begotten of the Father before the ages according to His Godhead, and the same in the last days for us and for our salvation born of Mary the Virgin. . . .' Christ, the 'only-begotten', was 'made known in two natures, without confusion, without conversion, without division, without separation'. It is fair enough to quote this since, although the Council was held in the middle of the fifth century, the Church of England *Report on Doctrine*, 1922, holds itself to be affirming the same truths, though it did not consider itself bound to the metaphysics behind the terms used. Theologians within the Church have, of course, argued endlessly on the interpretation of this formula: there has been an enormous variety of different emphases and constructions. Nevertheless, the central Christianity of the Church is the Christianity of the Creeds. If we are going to be clear in any talk of the Jesus Christ of 'Christianity', we must be clear and firm about this.

I assume, too, that Christianity in this sense must be *both* historical *and* theological. This follows if Jesus Christ was 'the same substance according to His manhood', etc. Orthodox Christianity involves theological Christianity, trinitarian in character. One is inclined to say that this is, for Christians, axiomatic. On the other hand one cannot use the term 'axiomatic', since axioms cannot be dispu-

ted, and theologians have in fact disputed a great deal about the importance of history, theology and their relations. On the one hand, there are those who seem to have emphasized history at the expense of theology – from Ritschl, Harnack and others to the ‘Jesus of History’ schools. On the other hand there are the form critics and such theologians as Brunner and Barth, who show little interest in the Jesus of history, concentrating on the Christ of a theological faith.

Whether ‘axiomatic’ or not, it seems to be obvious that *some* sort of ‘christology’ must go hand in hand with history. ‘*Some* sort’. It need not be incarnational and trinitarian in character, and if one is not an orthodox Christian, it has to be something different. But the point is that there cannot, as I see it, be *just* historical statements about the life, death, person and teaching of Jesus Christ; there must be conceptual interpretation as well.

No one who is not a professional expert is properly competent to pronounce either on the security or on the insecurity of the construction of the *historical* Jesus. On the other hand, since the *theology* of christology implies many philosophical assumptions, the philosopher who is knowledgeable and expert enough in theology might have something to say. I am afraid I cannot claim to be highly knowledgeable, or expert, nevertheless I shall venture to express some bald opinions.

On *history*, though the outsider may be no expert, he is at least safe in saying that the historical questions, or some of them, are at least debatable – if only because they have been so much debated. Some scholars are easy about the historical ‘general impression’, and some are uneasy. On *theology*, any philosopher can see how difficult – it might be said impossible – to clarify and confirm are many of the grand and sweeping metaphysical statements of the theologians. Then again, as regards the *relation* of historical to theological questions, any philosopher can see that to make some historical statements (as, e.g. certain statements in the creeds) dependent upon a complicated theological construction, is a very queer business. The position seems to be something like this; there is a rather shaky and at many points disputable propaganda base, upon which historical affirmations about the life of Jesus are made. The records (we all know) were not written as history; the historical reconstruction builds up the picture of a religious Messiah, a very exceptional man (though even this has been disputed), a ‘Master’ in many ways unlike the expected Messiah. One of the culminating points is Peter’s reported declaration, ‘Thou art the son of the

living God'. From this springs the theological-metaphysical construction. It comes from St John outwards and onwards, the doctrine of the Incarnation of the Logos, of the Second Person of the Trinity. This is later worked out in the orthodoxy of which the Chalcedonian formulation is definitive. From this comes Jesus Christ as God-man, worshipped as God by the ordinary Christian in a plain straightforward way, and by the Christian theologian with his own subtle interpretations.

All this – what may be called the reflexive influence of metaphysical theology upon history – makes it possible for some orthodox Christians to make as 'historical' affirmations what conscientious secular historians would have to deny as being firmly historical. An orthodox Christian can affirm that the miracles – in particular the miracle of Jesus' resurrection from the dead – actually took place. Again, Dr Farrer for instance has said that we may 'believe in the virginal conception as a matter of historical fact on grounds of faith'.<sup>1</sup> I know everyone does not agree about this. But it seems to be the case that shaky historical statements of fact have been based upon grounds of disputable theological metaphysics.

As examples of history-mixed-with-metaphysics, and of metaphysics itself, I can only mention, choosing quite arbitrarily, such boringly familiar instances as the following. There is the alleged sinlessness of Jesus Christ. Historically stated, this means that in his life of thirty years or so, Jesus never sinned. But of course, historically speaking, we have no sufficient grounds for saying this, nor could we have. Apart from certain disputed incidents which look a bit like irritability or even bad temper or spite (and I don't think they prove anything), it would in general be impossible to know historically that Jesus *never* sinned. But at this point theological metaphysics comes in, and at once well-known dilemmas arise. *Qua* God, how could he sin? How would it be *possible* for him to sin? But if it were not possible for him to sin, how could he really be a man? If God, how could he even be tempted? The official answer is of course that he was 'in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin'. But this, stated as though it were a simple fact, is only a constructed (biblical) theory, and raises the problem all over again. Yet it is taken on authority and affirmed as part of the firm faith of a Christian. To many people all this seems something of a scandal – and not a scandal in the euphemistic, even respectable, sense in which theologians speak of the 'scandal' (*skandalon*) of

<sup>1</sup> *Kerygma and Myth*, p. 220.

Christianity – but a scandal of muddle or of deliberate contradiction.

This problem is an outcome of the God-man hypothesis, itself a construction (and not the only possible one) arising from the apparently striking impact of the man Jesus in the context in which he lived and worked. But the construction raises questions to which there have been different and conflicting answers, none of them definitive. As the incarnation of God the Son he was the same being who existed co-eternally with God, but now, somehow, 'was made man', became truly human, and *qua* human, not divine. How does this make sense? How can the human Jesus also *be* God? And if we go back to the co-eternal Son aspect, the difficulties are even worse, if that is possible, because so remote from any experience, so metaphysically speculative, at times even so fanciful. The Persons of the Trinity are Three-in-One. A quite plausible explanation can be offered of how the doctrine of the Trinity arose – as expressing different aspects of God's manifestation, The Creator, God as Incarnate, the continuing Holy Spirit. But although the 'Persons' language has been much criticized, the 'aspects' language is not approved either, and the word 'Persons' still continues to be used, and used in ways which to any philosopher (and to many others, including many Christians) are quite fantastic. God cannot be a lonely sovereign above the universe. If he be Love (and what, *exactly*, does this mean?) his love 'must be such as to give scope for self-bestowal within His own Being'.<sup>2</sup> Barth, who at one point thinks that Jesus may not have been even a very interesting man, says much the same thing. 'Even in the life of God within the Trinity, of course, the eternal generation of the Son or Logos, is the expression of God's love, for his wish is not to be alone . . . God is not lonely: love has its object in itself.'<sup>3</sup>

Every phrase and term here, which has such quasi-clarity, is full of what I think any independent philosopher who did not allow himself to be hypnotized by rhetoric would call pretentious obscurity, or where not that, myth parading as confident statement of ultimate fact. What does 'the life of God within the Trinity' mean, and what does Professor Barth presume to know about it? What does he know of God's wish not to be alone? Or that God may not even be very 'lonely'? What is 'eternal generation'? And why is it generation of the 'Son'? At this level of bland anthropomorphism, the Arian quip that if the Son were eternally co-existent with the Father, he would

<sup>2</sup> *Doctrine in the Church of England*, p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> *Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 158.

be Brother not Son, seems perfectly in place, or at least no worse.

These statements are theories, though of a very loose kind. It is nonsense to say, as David Jenkins does in his recent book *The Glory of Man*, that the account of Incarnate Love 'is not a theory but the faithful perception through experience and experiment wholly involved in things and events, of the patterns and purposes of God who transcends materiality and history'. It is a theory, though not only a theory; it is also much else. And the trouble is that the theory is made an integral part of a *credo*. Barth's statement just quoted is not literally part of any creed, but it is of a piece with the creeds; he is not – at this point, anyhow – writing from a peripheral point of view. The same is true of the statement from the *Report on Doctrine*. There is a whole range of statements like these which are liable to break out, as pious phrases, at any time in any Church. The ordinary church-going Christian is not offered them as debatable speculations but as a part of his most sacred belief.

It is always said that the Trinity, the Incarnation and allied doctrines are 'mysteries'. I would certainly be the last to deny the mystery of God and the universe; sense of mystery must have a central place in any religion. In particular, if God is, his relation to, his presence 'within' man (and not only in Jesus), must be mysterious. But many people feel (and I among them) not that there is too much mystery in the doctrines but far too little. The picture built up by the theologian out of mythic images, analogies, concepts, set forth with rhetorical confidence, is too neat and pat to convince any but the indoctrinated – or inoculated – that it is indeed the mysteries of God which we are being led to contemplate. There seems to me to be an over-assurance of being able to state the structure of divine mysteries. The same assurance seems to blind some writers to the fact that the human constructs – sometimes in unclear and self-contradictory form – are not *designative* paradoxes, that they do not designate the mystery of the divine, but are some out of many possible constructions which do not always necessarily help us to approach divine mystery with more illuminated insight, but become substitute formulae, getting in the way of a more open, growing approach.

Of course, as enquiring human beings, faced with prevenient mystery, we are compelled to think, or at least to try to think; and human thinking is always in terms of symbols – of one sort or another. I tried in a book of mine<sup>4</sup> to show how religious and

<sup>4</sup> *Ways of Knowledge and Experience*, Part II.

theological thinking uses many languages and many sorts of symbols – of poetry, myth, analogy, worship, ritual, concepts, history – to show how they are all needed as passage-ways to mature religious consciousness, but how they can become obstacles if we stop and stay in them, how we have to accept them all exactly for what they are worth and at the same time must be ready to pass beyond them to new and enriched intuitive experience which itself is a stage and never final and certainly never infallible. (If we stop and stay with any set of symbols (e.g. concepts) they become idols. The doctrines of the creeds can easily become our idols.) The enriched intuitions, though they have assimilated all that is best from the various symbolic articulations (including ordinary propositional language) are not in themselves propositional, but fresh encounters, with fresh if always limited insights. I wrote there, too, of symbols as both ‘bridges’ and ‘barriers’.<sup>5</sup> I pointed out that though some symbolic systems (e.g. the scientific ones) can be fairly adequate for their purpose – though corrigible – no symbolic system, or combination of symbolic systems, can be adequate to *religious* understanding. Some are better than others. The poetry of reverent humility, of which the Old and New Testaments afford countless examples, as does some of the language in the creeds (e.g. the Nicene) and of religious services, is an instance. It is the language of image and wonder. The fixed conceptual language which, it is to be remembered, it is *mandatory* to believe (‘We confess and *all with one consent teach* men to confess . . .’) as the official and – in some parts of it at least – the final and exclusive truth, this language does not seem to me and to many others to lead to openness and growth but to set up rigid walls. These particular symbols can be ‘barriers’ more than ‘bridges’. Or, in other language, as I suggested, they can easily become ‘idols’.

I know, of course, how theologians and other religious men manage to survive their theological education: it is always a comfort to a professional educationist to remember how resilient in face of education human nature can be! I know how theologians can leap over the barriers (or smash the idols) and I know of the reputation for tolerance possessed by the Church of England. I know the reservations which can be made. I know that heresy-hunting, at least in our own circles, is a thing of the past. But I almost (though not quite) wonder whether it should be. I am trying to be logical, and it seems to me that there is a rigidity built in to orthodox

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-30.

Christianity which logically excludes those who cannot assent to its creeds. In spite of the disclaimers and of all the advances of theology, assent to the doctrines of the creeds is required, and not only of ministers of the Church. Temple once said that he did not believe in any creeds but in the living God. Yes, but. . . . All this is a piece of logic, not at all original. I am not proffering moral advice, which it would be impertinence for me to do. It is argued, I know, that reform from within is more effective, and so on. This is the practical as distinct from the logical question. Again, we do not have to jettison history. But, as I wrote somewhere long ago, it might be better to say 'The Fathers believed . . .' rather than 'I believe', or 'We believe'. This, of course, would not dispose of the problem.

I must try to answer here a criticism made by my friend Professor P. H. Hirst after a private reading of a draft of this paper. The gist of it is, that those who are convinced that Jesus is supremely and uniquely significant are entitled to construct a theological system which may in part be mythic, poetic, etc., and that I am too dogmatic in assuming that what seems to me to be a fantastic and unconvincing construction may not be a legitimate exercise, perhaps even a sound one.

Well, I agree that the exercise of theology is legitimate, inevitable, unavoidable, and I must repeat that my rejection of orthodox theology is an *opinion*, my own (though shared by many others), and that, certainly, more orthodox positions are held by distinguished minds for whom one has profound respect. But the real difficulty is not in acknowledging the legitimacy of speculations of different kinds, but of the position with which the Church faces its members.

Historically the Church had to formulate its creeds in order to state its position as against various heresies. But the difficulty is that once it had done so, the creeds became mandatory for Christians, so that the proper order of things became reversed. The proper order – which was in fact the historical one – is as I stated earlier. Here was a person, Jesus, who was so amazing, so supremely, uniquely significant, that he *must* be God. If so, constructive theology is instantly necessary – and you get the speculative systems centred upon orthodoxy. But – equally instantly – orthodoxy becomes the *official* teaching of the Church, and the whole order of history, logic, religion, is reversed, and seems to go wrong. The speculative mythico-metaphysical construction of theology is now presented first to the subordinate Christians. The Jesus Christ of



*this system* is offered to the would-be believer, and must be accepted *de fide*. The direct challenge of Jesus for free acceptance or rejection is no longer the basis of faith. (Hence the natural and nostalgic longing for the 'Jesus of History'.) One can see how naturally and inevitably all this arose. But one can also see (or so I think) how logically and religiously wrong it is. The conclusions of theology are offered to the churchman as the presupposition of religious belief.

One is bound to speculate about Jesus. If one is not bound to orthodox speculations, there are others. One very common construction for those who still believe themselves to be religious, unorthodox but still sympathetic to much in 'Christianity', is the following very familiar one. It is a construction which is not open to the history-deduced-from-contradictory-metaphysics-objection. It can accept Jesus as in a sense a 'Messiah', a man for his time, the great teacher, the great person, a man whose life and teaching and manner of acceptance of death revealed God freshly. Such a construction might affirm that God 'acted' through Jesus, though it would deny that the revelation of God in Jesus was exclusive, once-for-all. Because Jesus lived, no doubt things were changed. It was a new beginning; things after it were inevitably different through Jesus; man's understanding of the things of God has been for ever increased. This interpretation – ruled of course immediately out of court as inadequate by traditional Christians – would be a religious interpretation – and the language of it would not be accepted by many outside the churches. The interpretation, whilst admitting God's somehow acting in Christ, would deny that he *was* divine, or *was* God. It could quote the late Professor Pringle-Pattison's words: 'In order to give authentic tidings of God, Jesus did not have to *be* God.' Such a view would say that if the divine be in Jesus as it is to some measure in all men, then the way is open (and has always been open) for our direct communication with God – at times it may be through Jesus Christ, but certainly not only so, or always. Jesus Christ would not have the central or exclusive or final importance which he must have in orthodox Christianity, being God as well as man. He would not be the *only* 'way' to God. This, then, is a common view, dismissed as milk-and-watery by the Church. It is only the barest outline, of course. As an outline I can accept it myself.

To recapitulate. My main point so far has been that dubitable 'history', reconstructed on a basis of theological-metaphysical trini-

tarian christology which is highly speculative and disputable, makes it difficult for many people both inside and outside the Church to understand and accept Christianity: some think it quite wrong to put what is so uncertain and speculative at the very centre of prescribed belief. Unable to accept all this, they tend to go for an alternative which cannot be orthodox but may be called 'post-Christian'. By 'post-Christian' I do not mean, in this context, all contemporaries who are outside orthodoxy but only those outside orthodoxy who believe themselves to be 'religious' and who acknowledge a deep debt to the teachings of the Jewish-Christian tradition. The alternative, as sketched, seems to offer a more direct and freer approach to God, not always and necessarily through Jesus, and not through the constructed Christ of the Church.

This is all of course too simplified and vaguely sweeping – as up to a point an argument in a paper like this must be. I have said 'many people' and 'inside and outside' the Church.

Inside the Church, there are so many kinds and levels of persons and of understanding that it would be difficult (and rather pointless) even to try to classify them. But we may at least distinguish between the professional theologians and other scholars (with a few laymen who are highly knowledgeable), together with the working parsons who belong to this class, ordinary parsons who are not particularly scholarly, and the ordinary church-going member, fairly, or very, ignorant of the complicated theologico-historical implications of the God-Man interpretation which he is bound to accept, *de fide*, if he is to be a Christian in the traditional meaning of that word. The theologian and his like, whatever the particular school of theology he belongs to, must be a master of an intricate system – trinitarian, incarnational, compatible with the God-Man belief. The ordinary non-theological church-going Christian (including some parsons) broadly speaking accepts the propaganda-Gospels more or less as history, and the theological God-Man teaching on authority. He may have been well-meaningly misled at an early stage by an over-simple theology, learned from Sunday School onwards. He may well be a 'heretic' on the person of Christ without knowing it. But he is deeply conditioned by language infused from theology, repeating it in words and phrases. He has ready answers to objectors, but he is easily, perhaps distressingly, led into contradiction, for he has been used to repeating the words as part of ritual and liturgy which he sincerely loves. He is, until questioned, quite secure about 'Descent into Hell', 'Ascension into Heaven', 'Mother of God' (on the

face of it, surely a shattering idea?), the Incarnation of 'the Eternal Son', the Trinity, the Atonement of Christ for all sinners, the Reconciliation to God through Christ, the 'Victory of the Cross' – and perhaps about such lesser matters as 'Angels and Archangels'. All this is a form of Christian obedience.

It has always been strongly asserted that Christianity is for everyone (and Jesus preached to the multitudes), certainly not only for an élite of scholars. But *if* the true meaning of Christianity as expressed in the creeds is so-special-historico-theological, it is hard in practice to maintain this. The 'obedience' of the theologian has very different belief-content from that of the ordinary fairly ignorant Churchman, and it must be so if the mission of theological thinking means anything. As far as understanding of connected meaning goes, between the theologian and the ordinary churchman there is a great gulf fixed. I am not competent to say how well, or how badly, the teaching of the historico-theological meaning of Christianity within the Church is carried out: but even with the best teaching in the world, it is a very difficult thing to do.

One, but one only, of the difficulties is that once you begin to ask questions, more and more questions arise, and, logically, the whole lot. And it takes a pretty highly trained mind of a pretty special sort to be able to keep from drowning in these traditionally troubled waters. So there is a tendency – and it is sometimes a very humane tendency – to shy off raising the difficult questions with the weaker brethren. (And it must be remembered that here almost everyone except a professional is a 'weaker brother'.) So the gulf tends to remain.

All this is a problem for education within the Church. But the very fact of its intrinsic and inescapable difficulty raises another and more fundamental question – at any rate for anyone who is not committed to the one interpretation of the person of Jesus that he *was* God. The sceptic asks (and he is not necessarily a non-religious sceptic) *why* religious belief should logically require all this understanding of intellectual construction. The answer for orthodox Christianity has to be that it is the interpretation of the person of Jesus Christ as God-Man which requires it all. Logically it does require it all – or at least something very like most of it. Either you do not question it at all – and this is blind obedience – or, once started, you have to go into it thoroughly. If you do, the result may be alarming.

As Hobbes has put it in his usual pungent rhetoric: 'Therefore,

when anything therein is written too hard for our examination, we are bidden to captivate our understanding to the words; and not to labour in sifting out a Philosophical truth by Logick, of such mysteries as are not comprehensible, nor fall under any rule of naturall science. For it is, with the mysteries of our Religion, as with wholesome pills for the sick, which swallowed whole, have the vertue to cure; but chewed, are for the most part cast up again without effect.<sup>6</sup>

The religious sceptic (and by that I mean the sceptic who is not an orthodox Christian but who still calls himself 'religious') denies that a religious attitude should be either blind obedience to authority, or required to be founded upon belief – e.g. that Jesus is God-Man – which also logically *requires* assent to most disputable affirmations about theology, metaphysics and history. Christianity, *as a system of thought about belief worked out within the Church, is essentially and radically* questionable. The religious sceptic asserts that a free and secure faith cannot be based upon a foundation whose very existence is bound up with such debatable speculation. If the religious sceptic is a post-Christian he will return constantly to the treasures of Jewish-Christian teaching, but he will be able to select and choose what, by using all his highest faculties, he judges to be best in them, to the truths which, though stated necessarily in a local and temporal setting, are deep, permanent and universal. He will draw from the well-springs of goodness and love which he finds 'revealed' in the Bible. He will acknowledge that whatever 'knowledge' of God he has is richly indebted to the wisdom of the Old and New Testaments. But he will be free to draw from these sources according to his judgement. He will be able to quote Scripture freely without being the Devil. He will have no obligation to accept them simply on the authority of the Bible or the Church, and no obligation to fit them into the particular speculative philosophical-historico-theological frame which is provided for him by the Church and its ministering theologians. Jesus Christ will not have the supreme central place which he must have on any God-and-Man view. He will not be seen to be the complete or final revelation of God. Jesus may be a way to God but not the only way. Christianity, however great, perhaps unrivalled, its contribution to religion, will not seem to him to possess the exclusive rights which Christians have traditionally claimed – even if sometimes nowadays

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, reprinted from the 1651 edition, ed. W. G. Pogson Smith, Part 3, Chapter 32, p. 287.

it is said *sotto voce*. This is, I suppose, what would be called roughly a 'Unitarian' position, and it is held, I know, by some Quakers. On the other hand, the language of many Quakers (even if they have no formal creed) assumes belief in the divinity of Jesus which can make a visitor feel that he is there on false pretences.

Except for the acknowledgement of the debt to biblical wisdom, this has been, so far, pretty negative. And the acknowledgement has been couched in what I have called 'post-Christian' language. It has not referred to the possibility of 'religion' which is non-Christian – either in the West where Christianity has been the main tradition, or in other parts of the world where it has not. Nor has it referred to the profound good (in a wide sense) manifested in human compassion and action of many kinds, in the dedication of philosophers, scientists, artists – by men and women many of whom might call themselves 'humanists', and who are conscientiously unable to subscribe to anything which *they* would call 'religion'.

It has, as I say, been 'pretty negative'. But part of it has been the negation of a negation, and therefore in effect positive. I have criticized the exclusiveness of Christianity. If we are not exclusive in this way, then (still using religious though not necessarily Christian language) God is revealed in everything good, wherever and whenever it is. (Maybe in evil too – but this toughest nut I shall not try to crack here.) To say that 'every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights' is to speak with the New Testament, but it can conscientiously be borrowed for a wider religious language. In spite of protestations about 'the continuing work of the Holy Spirit', I do not feel that the manifestation of goodness which may occur anywhere, and is in that sense universal, is sufficiently generously acknowledged by Christians in the Church – who often talk as though Jesus Christ started everything, and as though one cannot (religiously) acknowledge that goodness wherever it is or has been, bears the marks of what religious people call the divine. To many people it seems highly artificial, and wrong, to be continually referring to Christ. Jesus himself continually acknowledged the priority of God (the Father). Why should we not acknowledge the same?

Perhaps divinity was *in* Jesus more fully than in any other man. The post-Christian or the non-Christian does not infallibly know this, and the orthodox Christian can only affirm that Jesus *was* divine and sinless with the support of his special theology. But for the post-Christian – if it is ever true to say that divinity is at work

in men at all – divinity is at work not only in Jesus Christ, but here and now. And the experience – or if you prefer, sense – of it here and now can be far more direct than the sense of it in Jesus incarnate, of whom we have records and who is separated from us in space, time, and a complex maze of concepts and images. There are Jews, Hindus, agnostics, atheists (as well as Christians) – whose goodness, integrity, selflessness, compassion, can show directly and convincingly the immanence of divinity – that is, if one chooses and is able to use this language. Or, in cognate language, here is the operation of the Holy Spirit.

This is of course post-Christian language, derived from Christianity: it is impossible, even if it were desirable, for a post-Christian to discard this language. And it can be used by the post-Christian without accepting all the implications of Christian theology. But of course I do not want to force this language on anyone else, and (with the reservation about language just mentioned) I now want to stress the importance of the approach through direct experience of 'immanent' good (a) for a possible religion which is not as much Christian (in that the divine Christ is not in the centre) with a brief reference (b) at the end to the importance of the same approach to depth and fullness of human living for those who are unable to accept religious language at all.

In talking of a 'possible religion', I want to make it clear that I am not trying to invent some new religion, but am attempting to describe what I think many thoughtful people today think and feel – perhaps vaguely. In doing so, I must say something about the idea of 'religion'.

Without trying to define it adequately or accurately, one may say that every religion has two sides. (1) In the first place there is an immediate, experiential, confrontation with what is felt to be of profound importance, in some sense 'transcendent' and (in the higher form of religion with which we are concerned) in some way *good*. (The way in which the good is felt to be good may be very queer at times, for the experience of *evil* may be part of religion too. There is a profound enigma here which, as I have said, I cannot discuss now.) (2) On the other hand, religion – and certainly not only Christianity – has a distinguishable but inseparable speculative and propositional side, in which there can be argument and dispute. There can be conflict between the experiential and the speculative sides, and they tend to alternate; they are distinguishable but inseparable. (There is also in most religions

a traditional element which I shall not discuss here.)

1. The experiential side has an aspect of feeling, sometimes emotion, which though in part subjective, is feeling of and for objects. The state of mind which is a marvelling, a reverence, a sense of 'otherness', a sense of transcendence which is also immanent, a sense perhaps of worship, is a feeling for *what* is 'marvellous', transcendent, which calls forth reverence, is worshipful.

2. If the experience on its feeling side is feeling of, or for something, the speculative and propositional element at once enters. Perhaps what we marvel at, feel reverence for, worship, is *called* 'supernatural', 'transcendent'. Perhaps it is worship of a Being, called God, who is the source of the supernatural, who is transcendently good, who is all-powerful, supreme. The Power is believed to transcend the causal processes of the natural world. Perhaps it is spiritual, a Source of the initiation of process. Perhaps Spirit is supreme, the source of the Good in all its forms, the Good which has *authority* over all we think and do. Perhaps in our experience of religion there is a sense of relationship (at times it may seem compellingly intimate) between ourselves and the supreme authoritative Good which we may call 'God'. Perhaps we say that religion consists in being 'God-centred' and not 'man-centred'. All this (and much more) is on the one side part of the feeling-for, and on the other a set of very debatable propositions. One emphasis is the religious, the attitude of belief, faith, involvement; the other is philosophical, affirming propositions and questioning them at every point. They can and do conflict, though the conflict is not necessarily mortal. And though inseparable, they tend, as I said, to alternate.

This is religion, or rather, a useful caricature of it. (I mean in the sense in which a caricature can emphasize cardinal points at the expense of everything else.) For religion, the immediate experiential element has to be speculatively interpreted. On the other hand, the immediate experiences of good can be accepted for what they seem to be in themselves: they have their own important autonomy. Basic experiences of good can be foundations of a religious edifice, but they do not require this edifice in order to be their own authoritative selves. Speculation tends to break in always, but authentic basic experiences are given, often practical and mandatory and not, as such, speculative.

Let us take some examples. There is, as I have said, a direct, immediate knowledge of and participation in good, here and now. It is good which compels acknowledgement and (in some cases)

emulation. It can seem self-evident and self-justifying. In this goodness I include moral goodness, though this is only one important form. Morally speaking, there are those for whom human compassion is everywhere the commanding motive, who give of themselves utterly, whose concern is for the needy, for outcasts, for victims of race prejudice or other persecution, of the cruelties of an unjust society. The Bible acknowledges this as a part of religion. 'Pure religion and undefiled' is to 'visit the widows and the fatherless in their affliction'. It is 'to do justly and to love mercy'. The concern of love here is first, foremost, *and independently*, for human beings. Thought of God need not enter into it, though for some people it may. The passage quoted ends 'and to walk humbly with their God'. This is one kind of immediately known, immediately imperative good, usually called 'moral'. But it is not the only kind. There is other goodness of the spirit, much of it discovered long since the era of the life of Christ, though not incompatible with it. There is integrity in the face of all sorts of difficulties and temptations. There is the devotion of thinking in philosophy and science and history, the devotion of the artist, his refusal to compromise, his sense of mission. Integrity in all walks of life is a fundamental good, with its sister-good, humility before what is greater than oneself. It would be invidious to do so, but it would be easy to name examples of philosophers, scientists, artists whose devotion, selfless devotion, to their vocations shows how autonomous are the various forms of good, how, primarily, they are independent of religion, authentic in themselves.

Another basic experiential impact, again immediate and in itself not speculative (though stimulating speculation) is the overwhelming sense of mystery of *being*. If I may quote from myself: 'Here am I, here we are, *existing*: and here is a world of nature and persons, so amazing (and in some ways so terrible) that its very existence at times overwhelms us. No doubt ordinarily we have little sense of this mystery of being, we take it all for granted like moribunds or half-wits. But sometimes it stuns us. We did not make ourselves, other people, the world: and the world did not make itself. We have a sense not simply of problems to be solved, but of ultimate mystery which has to be accepted as mystery.' To look, with the naked eye or down a microscope, at the staggering beauty and complexity of the commonest or smallest organism, or at the magnified structure of one of its organs, is to be stunned by mystery. And this, I would say, is another form of an experience of *good* in itself. We are over-



whelmed by the mystery of being. And though overwhelmed, we know that it is 'good for us to be here'. To be baffled, even agape, is defeating, and yet profoundly good.

These are some typical basic experiences of good; important, immediate, authentic, autonomous, valid in themselves, though not self-explanatory. They are not, as such, religiously speculative, and they self-justify living in depth, independently of religion. But of course speculation is at any moment liable to break out – and it may be religious or theological speculation, though not necessarily of a Christian kind.

One may speculate about a metaphysical basis for morals, for instance. If it is true that the authority of moral obligation does not come finally from myself, or society, or from external nature, one might argue that its authority must somehow be grounded in 'the nature of things', which does not originate in myself or society or the external world. If the moral good is the good, it 'commands': it is the case that we *ought*, whether we like it or not. Is it going too far to say then that the good must belong somehow to the nature of things, to the being of the universe? Is good ingredient in the reality which is beyond all human beings and beyond all 'nature'? And if good, and the command to good, is ingredient in the nature of things, is it a far step from this to the idea of God? If good commands unconditionally, absolutely, is it not of a piece with what is absolute, divine? And if I act in obedience to good, am I not participating to some degree in the divine and the divine in me? This is a (very debatable) speculation which could lead (without denying moral autonomy) to a religious interpretation of morality – not necessarily a Christian one.

Again, one may speculate metaphysically about the mystery of being, particularly the being of external nature. *Evolution* is undoubtedly a fact, but does any *theory* of evolution suffice to explain it? There are questions beyond science which we can hardly formulate, much less comprehend and answer. Yet the tremendous impact of evolving natural structures upon us, and the infinite mystery of their complex relationships, can in itself evoke religious feeling which is certainly not a proof but rather a declaration. 'O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom thou hast made them all.' Or, 'Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high. I cannot attain to it.'

Basic religious experience is not, as such, speculative. Yet the confident spontaneous affirmations of religion are already interpreta-

tions of the given good, and, in another mood quite distinct from, though continuous with, the immediate experiences, these interpretations can be *questioned*. As William Temple once put it: 'The primary assurances of Religion are the ultimate questions of Philosophy. Religion finds its fullest expression in absolute surrender to the Object of its worship. But the very existence of that Object is a main theme of philosophical disputation. It is not possible to surrender one's self to what is felt to be an unverified hypothesis; it is not possible to discuss impartially the existence of a Being to whom one is utterly self-surrendered. How then can a religious person be a true philosopher? Or how can a philosopher who has not yet solved the problems of existence permit himself the exercise of religion?' This is a classical conflict, never quite resolved. I cannot discuss it fully here, but I should like, briefly, to draw attention to some differences in the nature of the conflict as it occurs in Christianity, and in the looser, vaguer kind of 'religion' I have mentioned.

The tensions between warm religious experience, between belief, surrender, prayer, worship, conviction, the comfort (strength) which comes from it, and the criticism of the content of belief as well as the debatable speculations which arise out of it – these tensions are present not only in Christianity but in any form of religion. Consider the tensions of Christianity first.

In Christianity some people, but not all, are saved from the stresses of the tension by their acceptance of the authority of tradition. Their security is in the scriptures, the creeds, the ritual and liturgy of the Church. This for them is accepted as part of their life, without much serious question. The weakness of this is that it is blind. And if questioning begins at all, once it begins, it is hard for the ordinary un-intellectual Christian to find his way through the maze of a highly sophisticated and extremely intricate system of historico-theological thought within which belief in the God-Man is set. Temple says, quite rightly, that one cannot believe in 'an unverified hypothesis'. Of course, to the simple believer in his believing moments, the object is not 'an unverified hypothesis', yet looked at from another point of view, the point of view of any thinking about the affirmation that Jesus was God, this is exactly what it is – until such time, at any rate (if any), as it is 'verified'. Our 'simple believer's' faith, which in a sense he receives from the Church, is centred on the God-Man. One day something happens. He

begins to realize that some people, including some within the Church whom he is bound to respect, have raised questions about the validity of the God-Man interpretation of the person of Jesus Christ. He may be shocked. His unquestioning belief begins to be shaken. As soon as he goes a step or two further he may be lost in doubts which he finds are so tangled up with complicated speculations which he cannot understand (and cannot be expected to understand), that he may give way to despair. He may either stop thinking at that point and try to go back to his simple faith, or he may abandon it altogether. If his belief in Jesus-as-God goes, *everything* seems to go. In this distress he may be influenced by the generally sceptical atmosphere of our era. Everywhere, 'authority' is jettisoned without anything to put in its place. Another disturbing influence comes from the development of world communication – of different kinds. There is, today, far more awareness of other cultures and other religions: this may seem to make the exclusive claims of Christianity altogether too provincial. And, though he may still believe in Jesus as showing the love of God, concentration on the Jesus of two thousand years ago may now seem to him to have little relation to the many developments that have happened since. He has perhaps heard that philosophers and theologians have argued that – for instance – science was made possible by Christianity. But it sounds a bit strained to him. If he still believes in God he may reflect that God's revelation is much larger than could be envisaged in a religion which has its centre so long ago. Here is a description of a state of mind which is not uncommon. I am describing rather than arguing at the moment. I am not suggesting that Christian scholars do not have their own replies to all this.

The 'post-Christian' suffers from tensions too, but they are different. The central religious datum for the Christian is the impact of Jesus Christ upon him. But, as I have tried to show, though the (distinguishable) impact of belief is an event of great importance, the *content* of that belief for the orthodox Christian is an interpretation of the person of Jesus Christ which is shot through and through, not just with theory which can be questioned, but with a very special sort of prescribed theory, and theory which is a mixture of image, myth, highly speculative metaphysics, and sometimes, it seems, fantasy, all of a kind which is not only very difficult to understand clearly but which sober philosophers claim to be riddled with contradictions. The post-Christian, too, is aware of tensions between his surrender to immediate impacts felt religiously, and the speculative

interpretations of the meaning, content and implications of his basic experiences. He may feel it the more because, unlike the believing Christian, he is not *given* any authoritative interpretation which is *de fide*. He has not that security. His is a lonely, rather individual life, difficult to sustain unless he is pretty strong and mature both religiously and intellectually. He knows that, on the speculative side, his reasons (of various kinds) are not proofs, that they are open to question, and are questioned. 'Sober philosophers' have doubts here, too. On the other hand, his speculations about God are not esoteric, not special to a coterie of believers: they are continuous with the rest of philosophy. They are open to public debate, using arguments of 'natural' theology as opposed to arguments from *special* revelation. Though always debatable and never finally philosophically settled, they are speculations arising out of common human experience (moral, natural, etc.) and not only Christian experience. They are in a way simpler and more straightforward, reasonably argued about, not extraordinary like arguments about the life of God within the Trinity or the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity. Moreover, though there is a weakness in all tentative speculations (as speculations of natural theology are) the tentativeness is also a strength. It is unpresumptuous, humble, open. Being tentative, it is not shattered into total destruction by the first crucial objection raised against it. It can get on its legs and try another line. Very importantly, it is *free* in a way in which the speculative side of Christianity is not free. Although there are various interpretations of it, orthodoxy contains central affirmations which are dogmatic; argument may be far ranging; but in the end it is jerked by its chain to the central hook. The orthodox theologian cannot start another line beyond chain-length. This is a position which it is difficult, if not impossible, for philosophers to accept. It is true that philosophers, like other people, have to accept some things which are given and are not arguable: but these things could not (for the philosopher *qua* philosopher) include the dogmatic interpretation of the Christian 'given', insisted on, by the Church, of the person of Jesus Christ.

For the post-Christian, the basic 'givens' are the various forms of what appear to be self-authenticating good, open to all. Of course, even as immediately given, they are, as I pointed out, charged with meaning. There is an irreducible element of impingement, impact, but this, without meaning, would be empty. We come to every experience, however new and striking, with a background of some

culture or other, of personal experience, thought, action. The immediate impact of new experience – of compassion, or integrity, or the mystery of nature – can be apprehended only by interpreting, as well as questioning, minds, whose interpretation is given content and colour through what they bring with them to meet new experiences.

What each person brings to meet new impacts will vary greatly with different individuals. The disciples with their cultural background interpreted the impact of Jesus as that of a Master and Messiah, but each disciple in his own way: contrast John's with Peter's. Today, not only do sensitiveness, openness, readiness to receive and learn, make a difference to the meaning which is apprehended, but also depth of past experience and thought – thought which may be very complex and highly developed. Contrast the way in which a scientist with lively mind and sensibility *sees* the implications of the phenomena of nature, *feels* the depth of meaning, with the 'seeing' of the perhaps equally sensitive layman, whose understanding of implications is far less. I look down the microscope and am deeply moved by what I see; but my apprehension, and therefore feeling, of meaning, is necessarily limited by my lack of theoretical knowledge. The physicist's, or biologist's, immediate apprehension of and feeling for meaning is in a sense charged with theory, although it may be in the background; it is in a sense theory-laden, theory-infused. Further, if a person happens to be religiously speculative, that too will affect the colour of the meaning which he apprehends and feels.

I have criticized the God-Man as presented to the believer by the Church as 'theory-laden'. But if what I have just said is true, it may be asked in return: Are not *all* basic experiences of good to some degree 'theory-laden'? The disciples just mentioned were, of course, not 'theorists' in any recognizable sense, but even 'Master' and 'Messiah' are *concepts*, in the light of which they interpreted the person of Jesus.

Accepting that, in the loosest possible sense, this is always true, we have, I think, to distinguish between two different ways in which theory (in a loose sense) affects meaning, ways in which theories are formed, and how open or closed they are. To make this clear in the briefest way, I can only repeat in this fresh context the gist of what has already been said.

Speaking of the basic experiences of good, I said that each person has to bring what he has got to the interpretation of the *given*, and

that what a person can bring varies a great deal, ranging from what is naïve and unsophisticated to the very mature and sophisticated. Interpretation depends upon background, and it can also go on being built up tentatively, in open enquiry. If a post-Christian, for instance, finds that his speculations about the immanence of the divine in what he experiences, are wrong, he is always free to revise them in any way he can; he is not bound to them as dogmas. The good in integrity, compassion, beauty, the wonder of Being – these are not bound to particular speculative interpretations, as to the Jesus Christ given by the Church as God-Man. They are not subject to the special dilemma of what is, in some respects, a theological system where one crucial doubt can be doubt of everything. Interpretations, for post-Christians, are not taken on authority; they are not mandatory, or exclusive.

Again, they are not 'queer' or esoteric. I said, and repeat, that it is not just theoretical infusion which is the trouble about the given God-Man of the Church, but that it is such a very special sort of theory which is infused – a mixture of 'image, myth, highly speculative metaphysics and sometimes, it seems, fantasy, all of which it is not only very difficult to understand clearly but which philosophers find to be riddled with contradictions'. And it seems to be a very special sort of pleading, a closed sort. For the post-Christian, reasons and theories are open to criticism and correction at every point, and correction not only within a given system but by universal, public reason. Not reason only: it is ready to learn without pre-determined limit from other religions. World-communications are not a threat to the very existence of an open, growing religion. I am not of course saying that all religions are 'equal', everything as good as everything else, but that true religion must learn from what is true anywhere, and that there is no monopoly of truth. There ought to be real dialogue between people of different cultures and religions, without the surreptitious assumption, perhaps politely concealed, that we (Christians) have *the* one way to truth. I don't believe that Jesus' reported saying: 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no man cometh to the Father, but by me' need be interpreted as it usually is by Christians, or that Jesus, if living now, would so have interpreted it. But the Church, and the God-Man dogma, does quite literally imply an exclusive interpretation. I really do not think that reasonable liberal men can be expected to go on tolerating this intolerance, which is taught, not by Jesus, but by the dogma of the Church.

I have been speaking of an attempted religious interpretation of basic experiences of good. The basic experiences of good remain even if the religious constructions are wrong. They are the surest things we know. And a great many people today do think that all religious constructions are wrong. They would call themselves, and we may call them, 'non-religious'. My discussion has necessarily been very one-sided. (It has, for instance, excluded all reference to the important body of non-Christian Jews.) It has been an exposition of what I have called 'post-Christian' in a special sense; and it has been confined to the thoughts and feelings of what are very likely a minority of intelligent, thoughtful people who still think of themselves as 'religious', though in varying and perhaps vague ways. A larger body of people outside the churches in the West are 'post-Christian' in a wider sense, in that they have been, unless immigrants from some other parts of the world, brought up in a tradition influenced by Christianity centred in the God-Man. This is not, as I said at the beginning, a social survey, and the varieties of vague belief and unbelief must be legion. But it is probably true to say that as more and more people go less and less to church, and know less and less of the Bible, they become more and more ignorant of what is permanently valuable in the teachings of Christianity. Not only do they, or can they, cease to regard Jesus Christ as the *single* vital centre of their belief (for religious post-Christians do not want to do this either); they are hardly aware of him at all. This is a profound human loss – for many reasons which different people will stress differently.

It sets a major problem for religious education in schools under the control of the Public Authority. Religious education in the West must include teaching of the understanding of Christianity, though it should include, I am convinced, a great deal more. (As far as Christianity goes, one of the things which Christian – or post-Christian – education ought to do is something which, had there been time, I ought to have attempted in this paper to outline. It would be to go through the New Testament freshly to rediscover just in what ways Jesus – in every aspect – is significant today, universally, and for ever.) Experts in religious education are profoundly disturbed about much that goes on in the name of religious education in the schools. In what ways, in the near future, should we tackle this complex and vital question? It demands some very deep heart- and mind-searching.

## THE SAVING WORK OF CHRIST

*G. W. H. Lampe*

I MUST admit to a strong reluctance to offer this paper: for the very reason that its subject is the heart of the Christian Gospel. The Cross is the focal point of all Christian faith and devotion. This means that unless a man possesses the insight of a saint, such observations as he may make on this theme are bound to be superficial and inept in comparison with the profundity of the reality which he is trying to express; and even at best his individual understanding of it must be partial and incomplete, reflecting but a fragment of a many-sided truth. Christian tradition has recognized this fact in its refusal to accept any single interpretation of the Atonement as definitive and to endorse it as orthodox, in this respect remaining true to the New Testament, which attempts no systematic rationale of the Cross but speaks of the death of Christ allusively and under a wide range of different images. From the earliest times, Christians have believed that in Christ God has acted powerfully for man's salvation: that here is the decisive culmination of the mighty works of God in human history. It is scarcely possible to speak of an act of God otherwise than mythologically; and in the tradition of Christian theology there seems to be some recognition that as soon as we move beyond the bare statement that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate and add the words 'for us', we are bound, if we are to attempt any explanation of the meaning of these words, to have recourse to myth: not to a single myth but to a variety of pictures or stories, most of which may be useful as pointers to some aspects of Christian experience though none of them can be more than a pointer or be treated as though it were a statement of literal fact. In christology, unfortunately, the tendency has been to blur the distinction between myth and factual description and so to allow certain myths to crystallize into dogmas, thereby obscuring their proper function. In the theology of Christ's saving work this hardening process has been carried less far, and the mythological options have been kept more open. Hence it has



been possible for classical theologians to move freely from one myth to another and to speak of the work of Christ, whatever emphasis they may place on any particular mythological interpretation, without committing themselves to it exclusively. Hence the great variety of traditional images: the reconciliation of offenders (and, less happily, the reconciliation of God), redemption from sin, ransom from death or from demonic powers, emancipation from slavery, cleansing from guilt, expiatory sacrifice, passover sacrifice, propitiation, the satisfaction of eternal justice, the turning away of divine wrath, the payment of man's debt to the Creator, compensation by infinite merit for man's default and his offence against the honour of God, the vicarious suffering of man's just punishment, the supreme demonstration of divine love: the list might be extended much further.

In this paper, then, I shall attempt no more than to indicate certain points which I believe to be important in my own reflections on this tremendous subject, fully recognizing how inadequate they are and how much all that I say needs to be supplemented and corrected by the insights of those who approach it along different lines.

What the death of Christ may signify for us depends, of course, upon our belief about his person. Whether we express this belief in ontological terms, endeavouring to answer the question 'Who *is* Jesus Christ?', or in terms of function, in response to the question, 'What is done by Jesus Christ?' and so, 'What does God do in and through Jesus Christ?', it is clear that our approach to an understanding of the saving work of Christ is always through christology; or rather, perhaps, christology and soteriology are interlocking attempts to answer the same question. That a good man should meet a violent death through a parody of justice engineered by his enemies, and that he should meet such a fate heroically in the spirit of a martyr, is nothing extraordinary in human history. It is an often-repeated story. The crucifixion is remarkable only because of the Christian conviction that in the person of the crucified the Kingdom of God has indeed drawn near; that in him God has acted decisively: a conviction based on, and attested by belief in the Resurrection, that is to say, by the assurance that this person is both the historical figure whose memory is handed down in the Church's tradition and also the living divine Lord of his people, in whom faith continues to encounter the judgement and the grace of God. Whatever views Christians may take of the metaphysical

formulation of christology by councils and creeds, they agree, at the least, in finding in Jesus the supreme revelation both of man and of God. After everything has been said about the problem of the relation between the Jesus of history and the Christ of the primitive church's faith, the overall impression conveyed by the New Testament of the impact of the person and activity of Jesus is convincing. The Christian sees in this person the ideal or archetype of man as the Creator intends him to be, the new man who realizes completely for the first time the ancient hopes and ideals which had been focussed in Adam, Israel and the Davidic king: that is to say, the new man who is truly a son of God, one who stands in an unbroken relationship of intimate unity with God, a relationship of grace, love and trust which finds its supreme expression in his new and unique mode of address to God, 'Abba'. Jesus is the new man, the new or second Adam; yet his humanity is not discontinuous with that of all other men. In the language of Irenaeus, he is the recapitulation of Adam rather than the totally new Adam. He stands in full solidarity with his brethren, as the Epistle to the Hebrews sees so clearly; he is made like them in all respects.

Above all, Jesus is the man for God. It is in these terms that we should understand the words which the writer to the Hebrews adds: 'without sin'. The sinlessness which the Christian tradition has claimed for Jesus from the earliest times is hardly to be evaluated by reference to the question whether or not every action and saying attributed to him bears the stamp of moral perfection. Sin is essentially a religious concept. It refers to the personal relationship of man to God. It represents a deep-rooted and fundamental attitude rather than the particular moral lapses, offences and transgressions which are the external symptoms of it. It is the condition of estrangement from God and of commitment to that which is not God, whether this be the individual self regarded as the supreme end, or elements in a man's social and material environment which are made to usurp the rightful place of God. The impression made by Jesus was of one in whom, though he shared the human condition with all other men, there was no such basic estrangement: no barrier set up from his side to complete trust in God, responding to God's gracious approach. In him the universal tendency to sin, in the full and proper sense of the word, was overcome: not in a single moment but in the continuing course of a life committed to his Father.

It is important here to bear in mind the question of original sin.

The truth that men are born into a sinful situation, that is, a condition of alienation from God, involving a distortion of their proper relationship to others and to themselves, has often been mistakenly stated. It remains a fact, however, that the cumulative effect of idolatry, in all its many forms, creates a sinful society, one whose values, attitudes and principles spring from a basic estrangement from the Creator. In this social environment and heritage the lot of all men is inevitably cast, and its psychological and other pressures are inescapable. Even the saint who may be able to recognize, and to some extent to react against, a human society whose structures and way of life are sinful is necessarily involved in it and participates in it. More ordinary people consent to it; and even the saint, or perhaps especially the saint, is well aware of the tendency to sin that he shares with all men, the deep inner springs of evil. To say that in Jesus sin was overcome makes no sense unless he was himself involved both in the inevitable, even if involuntary, participation of all men, by reason of their birth, in the collective sin of human society, and in the deep-rooted inclination to reject God which all men know in their individual selves. In being a man, or, in the language of Christian mythology, in entering into the human condition and taking our nature upon him, Jesus must be a sharer in original sin. His humanity is by nature fallen humanity; otherwise there is no meaning in the record of his temptation, whether in the sense of his recapitulation and reversal of Israel's testing in the wilderness, or in the sense of enticement to evil which the writer to the Hebrews seems to have in mind when he describes Jesus as tempted in all respects like us. Whatever St Paul may have intended when he says that Jesus Christ was made sin for us, it is surely legitimate to apply his words to the involvement of Jesus in the corporate sin of mankind (in the social order, for instance, of the Jewish people in the Empire of the first century) and his participation in the inherent tendency of man to resist the grace of God: the following of Adam. Every docetist christology denies the gospel at this point, whether such a christology takes the form of Apollinarianism or is expressed rather less obviously in the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. For there can truly be no Gospel if the work of Christ has not been to overcome sin at the place where it can only be encountered, within the human situation: if we cannot speak of him who smote in man for man the foe. In Jesus, conscious and deliberate rejection of God is itself rejected and continually replaced, despite inward and external pressure, by the unbroken communion



of love and trust: so that St Paul is also right in speaking of Jesus as 'him who knew no sin'.

Jesus, then, is the true Adam in whom sin is overcome in a unique manner by trust and love; he realizes and embodies the sonship towards God for which man is created, so that from him we learn the meaning of creation. If he is thus the archetype of man as restored (to use the language of an historical Fall) to his true relationship to the Creator, or, as we may prefer to say, the archetype of man as now for the first time set within the relationship for which he was intended, then this relationship must be based, for him as well as for his followers, on the free and unconditional grace, or graciousness, of God, apprehended and embraced by faith, that is, by personal dependence upon, and commitment to, God. In Jesus there is the perfection of that relationship to God which is now generally described by what is in danger of becoming a hackneyed phrase, the acceptance by us of our acceptance by God, or, in the language of classical theology, justification *sola gratia, sola fide*: by God's grace alone, laid hold of by faith alone.

Of course, in the case of all other men the idea of God's acceptance must be immediately associated with the paradox of the Gospel, that it is those who are in themselves wholly unacceptable whom God accepts: that God's righteousness is declared in the seeming absurdity of his justification of the unrighteous. It would be unthinkable to ascribe unacceptability to Jesus; yet even at this point there may be some relevance in St Paul's thought that God sent his Son 'in the likeness of sinful flesh'. His participation in John's baptism, where he declared his solidarity with sinners awaiting judgement, and his self-identification, by virtue of his humanity itself, with the social structure and life of the human community of his time, may suggest the possibility that although Jesus, according to the impression made on the memory of his followers, experienced no transition from sinfulness to faith, but rather a continuous and unbroken growth in communion with his Father, yet in the very fact of his solidarity with the sinful race of men there may be discerned a kind of likeness, even in his case, to that acceptance of the unacceptable with which God receives us.

However this may be (and one cannot follow such speculations without reflecting psychologically on the experience of Jesus in a way for which the Gospels afford neither data nor encouragement), we can certainly say that his union as man with the Father is, as the writer to the Hebrews so clearly understood, a union of grace

and faith, that is to say, accepting love embraced by dependence and trust. It found expression in prayers and supplications, and it issued in a life of total obedience, of which the focus and the crown is the supreme moment of his death. He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. This obedience, by which, according to Hebrews, he was made perfect as our high priest, and which is so central a feature of the Johannine portrait of Jesus, is, like the 'works' of the faithful believer, of which it is the model, the practical outworking of faith. This has an important bearing on our understanding of the Atonement, for it means that the concept of merit as determinative of man's standing in the sight of God must be altogether excluded: not only in respect of merits earned by our own achievement and the merits attained by the saints, but also the merits of Christ himself. Many doctrines of the Atonement assert, rightly enough, that for us merit is excluded, and to seek to claim it is the basic sin of pride, the ultimate expression of the mind of the flesh; man can be justified, or put in the right with God, only by unmerited grace on God's side and, on the side of man himself, only by the faith which brings nothing in the hand which takes what God gives. Yet they go on to suggest that the ground of justification, the prior condition which makes our undeserved acceptance possible, is, after all, meritorious works: the merits of Christ. So we are justified by works, though at one remove, as it were, and God's gracious act consists in transferring to those who have nothing to show but demerit the credit of Christ's achievement. God can justify the unrighteous because Christ has been righteous for them: in their place. In the allegory used by Calvin and others, we come into the presence of God clothed, like Jacob, in the garments of our elder brother: under cover of his righteousness.

Now it is quite possible to interpret this simile in a way which avoids the idea of a purely substitutionary righteousness; and the image itself is valuable, for it is certainly true that God sees us, as it were, in Christ and accepts us in him and not for the sake of what we are in ourselves. This need not, however, and should not, mean that Christ's obedience, as an infinitely meritorious work, is imputed to us. Righteousness, like sin, is a word which primarily denotes a relationship to God, and only secondarily the kind of ethical conduct which this relationship implies. It consists in a right relationship to God, the sonship which God confers through his gracious approach to us and our acceptance of it by faith. In this proper sense of the term we can say that Christ's saving work is his life of

righteousness, his human life of sonship with the Cross as its climax and its ultimate testing-ground, with the Resurrection as its vindication and attestation, and the imparting of his righteousness, his life in grace and faith issuing in obedience, to those who live by faith in God through him. This righteousness is given to us to share: as an object of hope, since it remains partial and incomplete in this life, but already being experienced as reality in the community of Christ's people.

So far I have considered only one side of the picture. I have spoken of Christ simply as the new man: the new man who brought into being a new possibility of faith issuing in obedience and lived out this response to God so fully that even the breaking-point of faith, the cry, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' was at the same time the moment of glorification, of perfect unity with the will of God: the new man in whom sin is removed out of the way. I have done this deliberately, because my essay on the Atonement in *Soundings* was, as I admitted in the concluding paragraph, one-sided. Its emphasis was almost entirely on the work of God in Christ, on that work as directed towards man, and on Christ as God's Word of acceptance and forgiveness. I said very little there about Christ's saving work in its Godward aspect, from the human side. Some critics complained, not unfairly, that some of us who are most anxious to repudiate an Apollinarian christology, and to insist on the reality and completeness of Christ's humanity, are inclined to adopt a kind of Apollinarian soteriology and to suggest that his work is purely and simply a work of God directed towards man and not at the same time a work of Christ as man, directed towards God. I have therefore spoken of it first in terms of the faith-response of Christ as the new man. In passing on to what is even more important I hope I may take as read what I wrote in *Soundings* (which I should wish to reaffirm) and be brief about the essential truth that Jesus is not merely the object but the mediator of divine grace. In him the love of God addresses man with a unique directness, not as through the prophets. In his acts and words Christians encounter the word and deed of God; for he is wholly transparent to God, the image of the invisible God, the effulgence of his glory. The divine graciousness to which his obedience of faith is the human response flows out to others so that the future Kingdom of God makes its present impact upon them through and in him. In him God was reconciling the world to himself. His one-ness with his Father is such that his later followers

rightly see him, not merely as a prophet of God's word and wisdom but as being himself that Word and Wisdom: its human embodiment and manifestation, not only in his risen Lordship but in the obscurity of his earthly life. And in him God's gracious love declares itself in the acceptance of sinners; in a love for men that brings the Kingdom near to them and gives them the possibility to become children of God. His whole life declares the accepting love of God; but of this life his death is the seal, for God's acceptance of man in Christ knows no limits. It is pressed to the point, and beyond the point, where men reject God's love to the extent of crucifying the mediator of it, the one in whom love encounters them in the concreteness of a human life. The love of God in Christ without the Cross could be a love which stopped short: which evaded the descent into the darkest depth of man's sinfulness. On the Cross the love of God in Christ meets man even at the point where man deserts it, rejects it and slays it. In Christ God's love goes after that which is lost even though this is no harmless lamb but a man-eating tiger.

Here we rightly discern the supreme revelation of God's love and of his judgement. By judgement I mean the showing up of the true nature and extent of man's alienation from God, the bringing of sin into the open and the full disclosure of its moral wickedness. It is shown up and condemned in and by its apparent victory over goodness and love; for the moment of sin's power is revealed as the moment of the glorification of God in Christ through his death and resurrection. The condemnation of evil, in the moment of its apparent strength, by divine love, in the moment of its apparent impotence, is a paradox which in some degree is continually re-enacted in, for example, the martyrdoms of our own time and of past centuries. Our understanding of the person of Christ, however, makes the Cross and the Resurrection the decisive and ultimate disclosure for us of the judgement and condemnation of sin and the final revelation of God's accepting love; for the love of God is undefeated and the crucified one is vindicated as the Lord to whom all authority is given in heaven and earth. I need scarcely underline the obvious point that I cannot see Christ as the one in whom human sin is judged and condemned by God. In the Passion drama it is not the central figure who embodies and represents our sinfulness. In him sin is overcome by faith and obedience at the point where this is put to the ultimate test; sin is shown up and condemned in the persons of others: Judas, Peter, whose denial

of Jesus is a paradigm of the sin which later Christians regarded as unforgivable, namely apostasy, and the other participants in the rejection of God in Christ. Their sin is judged by the very act in which it is accepted, as it were, by love and made an instrument of goodness, of the glorification of the Son of God. The devil, to use mythological language, is condemned; the prince of this world is judged.

Having said that the death and resurrection of Christ is the central and decisive revelation of the love of God in its acceptance of sinners, I have to ask whether Christ's saving work is simply to reveal, or whether it is also an act of God which effects something. Does it actually change the human situation? This question brings us to the old controversy between so-called objective and subjective theories of the Atonement. Orthodox Christianity has always, and rightly, rejected the Gnostic conception of the Saviour as the Revealer, who saves simply because he reveals knowledge about God and man. Nevertheless, the question is often posed in the wrong terms, as though divine revelation were a matter of illustration only, and therefore an exemplarist view of the Atonement, seeing the Cross as the place where the self-giving love of God in Christ is perfectly demonstrated, must be inadequate because it leaves man where he was before and does not change his situation. It presents him with a beautiful picture and then leaves it to him to do something about it by way of response. This is false, because God's revelation, his self-communication or word, is powerful and effective. Revelation and act cannot be isolated from each other and treated as alternative possibilities. In the disclosure of the love of God man encounters grace; grace which must not, of course, be conceived of as an impersonal and mechanical force but as the personal graciousness of God, which cannot leave the situation unchanged. Grace cannot be without effect. In the short term, at least, its effect may be two-edged, according as it is rejected or embraced by faith: the retention or the remission of sin. In the last resort, however, the Christian hope, based on the Cross and Resurrection, must be that grace prevails, by the power of attraction. Grace is unquestionably objective; it is the gracious approach of God to man, though the faith by which it is apprehended may be analysed as subjective: man's own free response. Even so, it remains true that the believer will say of his faith-response itself, 'not I but the grace of God with me'.

The Atonement means, as St Paul saw, that in Christ God recon-



ciles the world to himself. This does not imply that the work of Christ effects a change in the attitude of God to his creation. For that very work is God's; it is the outgoing of divine graciousness to man and the response of obedient faith which grace evokes. If reconciliation were necessary on the side of God, then Hosea's God would have been a baseless dream; indeed, the revelation of God in the history of Israel would be contradicted, for the prophets and the Deuteronomic writers were convinced that God chose and rescued Israel, and covenanted with them to be their God, as an act of unmerited grace. God's love did not wait upon the satisfaction of his ethical demand. The Law, rightly understood, is the response evoked by prior grace. It is the divinely ordained mode in which faith finds practical expression in obedience. The Gospel, in both the Testaments, is the assertion that God's love is unconditional, that it embraces, paradoxically, those who have no claim to his recognition, and that it so far transcends ordinary notions of justice that there can be no question of a problem of reconciling divine righteousness with divine grace. We should certainly be wrong in supposing that God's unchanging attitude of love needs to be, or can be, altered by an act of satisfaction made from the human side. Wrath does not give place to love; but man needs to be changed if love is not to be experienced as wrath (which is an anthropomorphic theological way of speaking of the predicament of estranged humanity).

To affirm that God does not need to be reconciled opens the way to misunderstanding. It easily suggests a reduction of the love of God to sentimentality, as though his eternal attitude to man were one of indiscriminate benevolence. As many have realized since Athanasius formulated the dilemma, it is not enough that God should simply forgive man's sinfulness; for the cheap forgiveness which scarcely differs from the condoning of evil is not worth having. It would be inconsistent with his righteousness for God to forgive and forget thus easily.

This is not at all what we mean. It may be that forgiveness is a term to be avoided in connexion with Christ's saving work; for it conveys too superficial an idea of what is meant by reconciliation. It does perhaps suggest the notion of a God of easy-going benevolence. Something more is certainly needed than forgiveness in the ordinary sense of the word. But that 'something more' is not compensation or satisfaction. Such notions are incompatible, not merely with forgiveness, but with grace and love at the most profound level.

To believe that God's work in Christ deals with sin seriously should not involve these notions which are derived from business transactions. Still less should it involve the idea of vicarious punishment. Retribution, which is based upon the idea of distributive justice, and the rendering to every man of his proper deserts, has no place in personal estrangement. I do not want to labour this point, to which my essay in *Soundings* was largely devoted. I would merely observe that there are two elementary reasons for the great gulf which necessarily separates our thinking at this point from much traditional theology. The first is that our predecessors believed physical death to be unnatural to man and an expression of divine wrath; so that physical death is, for them, inextricably linked with spiritual death (which is alienation from God) as the wages of sin. For people who took the view of illness and death which is expressed in the Prayer Book's Order for the Visitation of the Sick, the fact that the incarnate Son of God suffered death must have prompted different interpretations from those which we can adopt. The second is the general acceptance until modern times of capital punishment, including death by torture, as entirely right and proper so long as it was inflicted justly. As the fitting reward of evildoers it seemed to be something approvable by God and man. Hence there could be nothing contradictory in the belief that the Creator and Father should decree death, and beyond death eternal torment, as the appropriate means of dealing with sin by the execution of sinners; nor could there be anything shocking in the idea that the crucifixion meant that the Son of God took the place of sinners, suffering in their stead the punishment which was their just due, and enabling God to pardon them without repudiating his justice. For us, no doubt, a God whose will sanctioned capital punishment, a God who imitated the spiritual feebleness of his creatures who have to substitute retribution for reclamation, would be no God; for he would fall short of the moral standards of sinful men; indeed, he would be a devil.

The 'something more' that is needed besides mere forgiveness is not satisfaction but re-creation. It is this which reconciliation implies, and not either an overlooking of evil or an act of compensation, whether this be thought of as a propitiation of God's wrath or as the satisfaction of a more abstract principle of justice. Re-creation means something like the prophetic hope that God would remove the stony hearts of his people and give them a heart of flesh. Hosea's God appealed to Israel to change its attitude of rejection,

to repent; not on the ground of a satisfaction to be made centuries later, but because of his unchanging love. But the possibility of repentance was scarcely present, for few men understood and apprehended the gracious approach of God to them. Men were not moved to repentance by the words of Hosea. The Christian Gospel, according to St Luke, is the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness of sins. This is what the disciples were commissioned to preach: repentance, not as a prior condition for receiving the Gospel as a remedy, but as a promised gift. Repentance and forgiveness are for St Luke the content, as it were, of the Kingdom of God. The work of God in Christ is to create the possibility of repentance, of the re-making of man. This is salvation, in the sense both of making whole and of being saved, not from God (wrath, punishment, and so on) but from estrangement. It is not to deny freewill and responsibility to say that sin has more the character of disease than of crime and that the biblical images about rescue, redemption and salvation, which are in any case more prominent than the language of forgiveness, are highly appropriate to the reality of the situation.

The decisive act of God in Christ is to bring his love to bear on human sinfulness in so radical and complete a way as to make repentance possible: to move men to a change of attitude, to be reconciled. This does not mean that man is presented with a visual aid to the recognition of the love of God and then left to save himself. It does not involve a Pelagian view of salvation. Grace is effective to create the reconciliation and to construct the bridge from man to God; and in Christ the human response of faith has itself been brought into being in full perfection.

God's revelation in Christ, as always, is *act*. It is objective act and decisive, once-for-all act, in the sense that there is no need for repetition. The question, then, is how an event of past history, thus interpreted, can alter the situation of succeeding generations of mankind. The answer lies in the Resurrection, the continuing experience of Christ as Lord, and in the renewal and reproduction, for ourselves and all men, of the outreach of grace and the response of faith and obedience which were in Christ. Our apprehension is at best feeble and partial; but it is still not absurd for Christ's people, as the primary locus of the Holy Spirit, to claim that they 'have the mind of Christ'. Christ's decisive work continues to re-create and make whole, in so far as the community of believers experiences and mediates reconciliation. This aspect of Atonement may be called subjective. There is no harm in that; what we are speaking of is the

work of God. It is mediated in and by the fellowship of those people who, to however small a degree, are Christ-like. The initial emergence of a group of such people brought about the writing of the New Testament, and presumably for a man on a desert island, and perhaps for others too, apprehension of Christ as the bearer of God's love and as the new man may be mediated through the pages of Scripture alone. But with the passing of the ages and the increasing strangeness of the first-century world it seems likely that the Bible, in itself, will become less and less able to communicate 'the mind of Christ' directly (I am not thinking of the short-term prospect, but of the distant future. Will the Gospels be intelligible to ordinary men in AD 5967 or 10967?). For most of us the mind of Christ is already communicated in large measure through Christian people. Hence one cannot properly speak of Christ's saving work without saying much about the Holy Spirit and the Church. Most central and important of all is the truth which St Paul embodied in his phrase, 'in Christ'. It is only 'in Christ' that his life, death and resurrection, which together constitute his saving work, present us with a source of grace and faith and not merely with a problem. And, of course, 'in Christ' must not be understood pietistically. It is a social rather than an individual concept. The object of the work of God in Christ is neither to build up an institutional Church as an end in itself (though it can be an instrument of his work), nor to save certain individuals out of a *massa perditionis*, but to remake the *world* by reconciling it to himself.

# SOME PROPOSALS FOR A MODERN CHRISTOLOGY

*P. N. Hamilton*

THE TERM christology is used in two senses. It can be confined to the doctrine of the *Person* of Christ; but for reasons that will soon emerge I take it in the wider sense of the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*: 'that part of theology which relates to Christ'. 'Christ' is, of course, a title: used on its own, it lacks a referent. I therefore prefer to speak of 'Jesus' or 'Jesus Christ', bearing in mind Paul Tillich's precise but cumbersome phrase, 'Jesus whom men call the Christ'. As Tillich thus reminds us, this combination of proper name and title must include in its scope the *response* to Jesus as well as his personality, teaching, and manner of life – and at least those aspects of the history and religion of Israel that are relevant to Jesus, to this response, and to the title Christ. And since the response includes the belief in his resurrection and ascension, the scope of the term 'Jesus Christ' must include the coming into being of this resurrection-faith and of the Church. Indeed this entire sequence of events possesses a unity such that we can meaningfully speak of it as 'the event Jesus Christ'. I here largely confine myself to its central core: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the initial response to this.

I shall seek to distinguish three constituents alike of the wider event and of this central core: history, mythology, and divine activity. These interpenetrate and overlap, but the main burden of this lecture is the assertion that the third constituent cannot be wholly subsumed under the other two. Theists who speak of God acting in or through some event often qualify this by saying that since God transcends both space and time he cannot be said to 'act' in any literal sense. We cannot here embark on the doctrine of God, but I would wish to affirm both God's transcendence in one aspect of his being and his temporality in another aspect, and to say that God does act within our temporal history, and that the response of faith – itself a part of history, affecting what follows – is a response to the *ontological reality* to which it points in saying *God has*

acted.<sup>1</sup> I affirm that God so acted within the wider event 'Jesus Christ', and in particular in his resurrection.

It may be helpful to begin by considering this claim in connexion with an event that we can perhaps view more dispassionately, the escape from Egypt under Moses. We need not concern ourselves with the mechanics of this, but rather with its religious status and sequel. For the atheist, the escape must have been due to good luck, good leadership, or Egyptian incompetence. The theist can say that God acted, either by a physical miracle or by so guiding the Jews that they benefited unwittingly from a sudden change of wind and tide; or he can deny that God acted and say rather that God's strengthening influence upon the Jews and their leaders – for example, as they turned to him in prayer – inspired but did not arrange their escape. Any of these views, including the atheist one, is an admissible interpretation of the evidence: a tribal nationalism, belief in their tribal god, and an unexpected and improbable escape *could* account for the rise of the exodus-faith and its subsequent centrality in the religio-political history of the Jews.

I do *not* believe that a parallel statement can be made about the birth of the resurrection-faith among the disciples of Jesus. Unlike the Jews on the East side of the Sea of Reeds, the disciples were not confronted with a sudden improvement in their fortunes – precisely the reverse. It may be that we sometimes exaggerate the disciples' despair at their master's death, and that in its very nature this despair was only temporary. It is also undeniable that a person's closest friends often see him in a new light immediately after his death. It may be possible to develop these and similar lines of thought to establish what for brevity's sake I will call a self-generated or psychological theory of the disciples' belief that their leader was in some sense still alive and present with them.

My first difficulty is that this runs counter to elements in the New Testament which seem to survive rigorous critical analysis and 'demythologizing': I have particularly in mind the disciples' *surprise*, their experience of being unexpectedly *accosted* by the risen Lord: neither the evangelists nor their sources had any motive for introducing this element, which is also found in Paul's own references to his experience of the risen Christ. Secondly, any naturalistic explanation of the rise of the Easter faith raises the further question why such a belief should have arisen once, and only once, in all recorded history. I believe that any modern christology must be

<sup>1</sup> On being-ful reality: ontology is the study of being.

very wary of asserting claims to uniqueness, and I shall decline to affirm traditional uniqueness-claims as to the nature of God's indwelling in the person of Jesus. But the birth and continuance of the resurrection-faith is a historical phenomenon so strikingly unique as to query the adequacy of any naturalistic explanation, and to suggest that that faith includes what I have called an ontological element and was, and is, a *response* to a unique act and presence of God.

In thus presenting a theistic interpretation of Jesus and his resurrection, insisting upon an ontological element where others see only myth, I will be held by some to have abandoned all claim to offer proposals for a *modern* christology. If in this connexion modern be synonymous with atheistic, and if the scope of christology includes the resurrection-faith, then – for the reasons just given – I have no proposals to offer.

I continue this lecture because I do not accept – and I sincerely hope that many of you would not accept – so narrow an interpretation of the adjective 'modern' in this connexion. I regard a christology as modern if it uses every relevant insight of modern knowledge to differentiate the historical element in its interpretation of the event Jesus Christ from the mythological, and remembers that the actual event comprises only history and the ontological reality of God's presence and action within that history – whilst the mythology expresses that reality in ways which may indeed convey deep truth, yet have in themselves the status not of ontological reality but of poetry. In saying this I assume that the starting-point for such a christology will be, not the historic creeds and formularies of later centuries, but the attempts of the New Testament writers both to describe and to interpret the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Our starting point is the New Testament, but this itself needs to be interpreted if it is to point us, as I believe it can, to the person of Jesus and the initial response first to him and later to his resurrection. These form the datum; the later insights, including the proclamation or *kerygma* in the New Testament itself, are highly significant for christology, but must be assessed in relation to our attempts to reconstruct that datum. In the words of Ernst Fuchs: 'Formerly we interpreted the historical Jesus with the help of the *kerygma*. Today we interpret the *kerygma* with the help of the historical Jesus.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> From the foreword to his collected essays, which is unfortunately omitted from the English edition.

I must here quickly re-tread ground covered in previous lectures. I take the view that the principles of form criticism have been established beyond question, but that some of the more negative conclusions drawn from them are unjustified. Detailed comparative analysis of individual sections or pericopae in the synoptic gospels has confirmed the hypothesis that during the lengthy period before the writing of our earliest gospel individual sayings and incidents in Jesus' ministry were – note the verb – *used*: as they were worked over and adapted, their context and wording may have been altered beyond recall. This analysis shows all the gospels to be deeply theological interpretations of Jesus. They are all so impregnated with belief in Jesus as Messiah, and as eschatological and pre-existent Son of Man, that it seems probable that these beliefs arose early in the pre-New Testament period. Indeed the evangelists and their source-material are alike so suffused with this post-Easter faith as to make impossible any attempt to construct either a biography of Jesus or a 'definitive edition' of his teaching.

The methods of form criticism help us to pick out aspects of the gospel accounts of Jesus' conduct and teaching which are in sharp contrast to the current practice and teaching of his day, and which it would not have been in the earliest church's interest to introduce into the material: for example, Jesus' attitude to women, his table-fellowship with 'tax collectors and sinners', his refusal of the epithet 'good', and Mark's comment – altered by Matthew – that in Nazareth 'he *could* do no mighty work'. That the gospel narratives do include actual historical memories is most clearly seen in their treatment of the disciples. Consider first the repeated references, particularly in Mark, to their lack of understanding. Of course the cynic can say that in attributing prodigious miracles and claims to the earthly Jesus, Mark is forced to exaggerate the disciples' failure to understand: to insert the messianic secret in order to compensate for unhistorical messianic claims. (He could add that the disciples' lack of understanding is most pronounced in the Fourth Gospel, where Jesus is portrayed as virtually identifying himself with the divine 'I AM'.) But it would have been just as easy – indeed more likely, if the evangelists and their sources paid no regard to historicity – to describe Jesus' immediate entourage as being swept along on this flood-tide of claims to, and acts of, divine authority, whilst emphasizing the lack of understanding of everyone else. There was no need to emphasize the *disciples'* failure to understand, nor their surprise at the resurrection, nor to record that one of the



twelve betrayed Jesus, that they all fled at his arrest, and that Peter denied him to a servant-girl.

Such honest reporting shows that the synoptic evangelists and their sources did attach some value to history. This makes it the more significant that there is no hesitation in attributing to the lips of Jesus sayings that can only belong historically to the post-resurrection period. I see this as evidence that 'the early Church absolutely and completely identified the risen Lord of her experience with the earthly Jesus of Nazareth'.<sup>3</sup>

The tentative nature of the findings of form criticism has already been stressed. But these findings are valuable in precisely those areas which most concern us if we seek the *same* sort of understanding of the historical Jesus as we have come to have of man in general – an understanding or image succinctly expressed in Dr Dillistone's lecture: 'This image is a "dynamic, temporal one that sees man as first of all an agent, a self", who stands self-revealed only in the midst of the density of temporal decisions.'

We are sometimes told by New Testament scholars that we are in no position to enter into – let alone to psychoanalyse – the mind of Jesus in order to establish the primary motivation for certain decisions or sayings, in particular the decision to go to Jerusalem at Passover-time which led to his death.<sup>4</sup> I am myself uncertain how sharply one can differentiate between a person's decisions and the motivation that lies behind them. In any case this does not affect the point I wish to make as to the application of Dr Dillistone's words to Jesus. For even if analysis of the individual pericopae in the gospels does not reveal the primary motivation of Jesus, such analysis does reveal his decisions, some at least of the competing pressures between which these decisions were made, and the still greater pressures they engendered. We find a striking unity between Jesus' decisions and actions and his teaching. He not only practised what he preached but also preached or proclaimed his own practice: '*Jesus*' *conduct* was itself the real framework of his proclamation'.<sup>5</sup>

I would agree with Fuchs and others that it was Jesus' conduct, thus closely reinforced by his proclamation, that led the Jewish leaders to destroy him. Jesus both proclaimed God's love and for-

<sup>3</sup> N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> See Bultmann's recent essay in *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ*, ed. C. E. Braaten and R. A. Harrisville, New York, 1964.

<sup>5</sup> E. Fuchs, *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, p. 21.

givenness and lived this out in his repeated table-fellowship with 'tax collectors and sinners', Jews who were regarded as having 'made themselves as Gentiles'. This must have been bitterly resented, as the gospels record. Is it fanciful to see a close parallel between this resentment and that of the prodigal son's elder brother, as also of the labourers who had borne the burden and heat of the day in the vineyard? Both parables proclaim that God loves and forgives all men, including the idler and the waster who becomes a swineherd, and precisely in thus proclaiming God's universal love they also justify Jesus' own conduct, grounding this in the very nature of the love of God. Here indeed is cause for the hierarchy to take strong offence: here also, as yet only by implication, is deep ground for the later belief that 'God was in Christ'. 'There is a tremendous personal claim involved in the fact that Jesus answered an attack upon his conduct with a parable concerned with what *God* does!'<sup>6</sup> Some find a similar claim in his characteristic *opening* 'Amen, I say unto you'.

In analysing the gospel accounts of Jesus' teaching, form criticism attributes greatest reliability to those elements that contrast with the outlooks of both Judaism on the one hand and the early church on the other. It must suffice to mention one complex of such elements, all closely inter-related. The Kingdom (or Reign) of God, Jesus' 'comprehensive term for the blessing of salvation', is an eschatological concept which shows that 'Jesus stands in the historical context of Jewish expectations about the end of the world and God's new future'<sup>7</sup> – yet his teaching also contrasts with that context. He dispenses with the customary apocalyptic 'signs of the end' (found only in secondary material). The Kingdom of God – the phrase itself is distinctive, being rare in the contemporary literature – is 'at hand', quietly and unobtrusively breaking through in the everyday situations of life. Jesus' emphasis is not on nations or groups (as in the Old Testament prophets), but on the *individual* as confronted *in and through his daily life* by God's demand upon him as summed up in the two commands 'love God' and 'love your neighbour as yourself'.

This direct relating of God to everyday situations is epitomized by the way Jesus addresses God, not as 'O Lord God, Creator of the Universe', but simply as 'Abba', 'Daddy'. The relating of *God* to

<sup>6</sup> E. Linnemann, *Parables of Jesus*, p. 87.

<sup>7</sup> R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. I, p. 4.

particular situations is also seen in Jesus' words of healing and exorcism: 'Your sins are forgiven'; 'Your faith has saved you'. In all of this Jesus stands in sharp contrast to his contemporaries.

In what has been so briefly outlined we find Jesus *proclaiming* the concern and love and forgiveness of God and *living out* that same concern and love and forgiveness amongst those he met, and those he went out of his way to meet. As Jesus called men to 'radical obedience', so he lived out that obedience, 'intensifying his obedience to the call of God as every successive challenge in life makes its impact upon him'.<sup>8</sup> To Dr Dillistone's description of the historical Jesus intensifying his obedience to God's call must be added St John's 'the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us'. Personification of the *Logos* belongs not to history but to mythology: the immense significance of this way of expressing that power of God which men sensed in Jesus – even if they sensed it only dimly before his death and resurrection – is perhaps brought home to our modern minds by Norman Pittenger's fine paraphrase 'the Word or *Logos* or Self-Expressive Activity of God'.<sup>9</sup>

We have now reached a point at which, in my view, the 'philosophy of process' of Alfred North Whitehead and others has something of value to contribute: I therefore make an apparent digression in order to give the briefest outline of that philosophy. Whitehead is best known in English academic circles for his work with Bertrand Russell in the field of mathematical logic. For the non-specialist, the most prominent feature of Whitehead's philosophical writings – like those of Teilhard de Chardin – is their fundamentally evolutionary viewpoint. But Whitehead was a mathematician, not a biologist: he was acutely aware of the two great discoveries in physics made while he was teaching mathematics, the theories of relativity and the quantum. Whitehead was also greatly concerned with aesthetics. As his mind turned increasingly to philosophy, the physicist in him sought to understand the whole of reality and not only man, whilst the aesthete in him interpreted all reality by extrapolation from human experience, thus finding aesthetic value in all actuality.

I here make two comments: that the resulting interpretation of the nature of the world is far easier to reject than to make one's own; and that it is peculiarly vulnerable to attack by linguistic-analy-

<sup>8</sup> See above, p. 96.

<sup>9</sup> *The Word Incarnate*, p. 187.

sis philosophy. (This because it extrapolates the usage of such terms as 'feeling' and 'mind' even into the inorganic realm.) Both comments apply equally to Christian theology, which also stretches the meanings of words.

Charles Hartshorne resembles Whitehead in having had the privilege, or the misfortune, to be the son of an Anglican clergyman. He has certainly had the misfortune of being too often labelled the 'leading exponent of Whitehead', whereas in fact Hartshorne is a significant philosopher-theologian who evolved his own principal positions prior to his contact with Whitehead. Hartshorne's main importance for Christian theology is his application of modern logic to the doctrine of God. The discipline of rigorously logical thinking has proved its value in many philosophical fields and should be more used – less feared, perhaps – in Christian theology. Highly significant for christology are these two quotations from Hartshorne's *The Divine Relativity*.<sup>10</sup> In the first he refuses to allow 'paradox' to cover up illogicality: 'A theological paradox, it appears, is what a contradiction becomes when it is about God rather than something else . . .' In the second he applies this to the relation between God's power and our human decisions: 'For God to do what I do when I decide my own act, determine my own concrete being, is mere nonsense, words without meaning. It is not my act if anyone else decides or performs it.'

Throughout this lecture I have assumed that whatever else we may believe about Jesus we accept that he was, inwardly as well as outwardly, a *man*: I need not spend time showing that this assumption is to be found in every part of the New Testament. Hartshorne's statement about human acts and decisions applies, therefore, to Jesus: we must not say that *his* acts and decisions were 'also' – still less, that they were 'really' – *God's*. If we feel that the concept of Jesus intensifying his obedience to God's call does not adequately express the divinity of Jesus, then we must seek to express this in ways that neither compromise his humanity nor rely upon contra-logical paradox.

One such way is suggested by Whitehead's philosophy of nature and in particular its central feature, which he calls 'the theory of prehensions'. Whitehead sees all actuality in terms not of substance but of process, not of being but of becoming. The process *is* the reality: every entity *is* the process of growing together into a unity of its 'prehensions' or 'impressions' of everything in its environment.

<sup>10</sup> pp. 1, 134.

But 'impression' is primarily a passive term, and therefore not a good paraphrase for 'prehension': 'grasping at' is better.<sup>11</sup> A novel entity 'becomes' by grasping at the influences surrounding it: in grasping at each such influence it incorporates something of its environment into itself, so that the novel entity *is* the growing together into a unity of all its graspings at the influences comprising its environment. Thus a viewer's impression of a painting is the growing together into a single unified experience of his impressions of all its elements, impressions which he does not passively receive like incoming telephone calls, but grasps at in his own distinctive manner.

As has been said, Whitehead interprets *all* actuality by extrapolation from human experience, and is thereby peculiarly vulnerable to linguistic criticism. Whilst some of this criticism must be accepted, I myself find aspects of this extrapolation from experience both meaningful and valuable. But it is precisely human experience and its relation to God – the human experience of the historical Jesus and the Easter experience of his disciples – with which we are here concerned; we need not consider this extrapolation and the criticisms of it, except to note that Whitehead sees his theory of 'prehensions' as also applying to God, emphasizing that 'God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles. . . . He is their chief exemplification.'<sup>12</sup>

In what follows, the person and resurrection of Jesus Christ are treated *not* as exceptions to, but as the chief exemplifications of, metaphysical principles. The principle applicable to the person, the divinity, of Jesus is that of immanence: *incarnation*; '*in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell*'. Whitehead's theory of 'prehensions' here offers a significant contribution: it attempts to describe the manner in which one entity is actually, not just metaphorically, immanent in another – actually immanent in that it contributes to and is constituent in the other's subjectivity. For Whitehead there *is* actual immanence, yet each entity, each experience, retains its own subjectivity. He saw experience – and therefore everything – as divisible, not continuous: drops of experience, like the frames of a cinematograph film. (There is a clear parallel here with the quantum theory, the discovery that radiant or electromagnetic energy consists of minute, discrete pulses or *quanta* of energy.) Each drop of experi-

<sup>11</sup> I prefer 'grasping at' to Whitehead's own usage of 'feeling' as an alternative to 'prehension'.

<sup>12</sup> *Process and Reality*, p. 486.

ence enjoys its own subjectivity during its brief 'process', the growing together of its constituent 'prehensions'. Only thereafter, when it has 'perished' as a subject, moved away from in front of the lens, is it available as an object to be grasped at by other subjects. Thus when a new subject, a new moment of experience, 'A', grasps at an object 'B' (itself, so to speak, an ex-subject, a moment of experience that has perished), what happens is that A makes its own an element or 'feeling' which formerly belonged to the subjectivity of B, wherein it was perhaps an insignificant, perhaps a decisive, element. Thus a part of B's moment of experience becomes objectively immanent in the experience of A.

This is so crucial to one of my christological proposals that I venture the personal illustration of my relationship with my wife. In common parlance, in so far as I am a good husband I enter into her joys and sorrows – as she certainly enters into mine. To take an instance that is perhaps unimportant, and certainly infrequent, consider my wife's first wearing of a new dress. As I 'prehend' her evident enjoyment of this I enter into her joy – or rather, I make something of her joy my own. At that moment my wife's enjoyment is central to her experience, to her *self*, and in so far as I make this my own I make an element of her – strictly, of the 'she' of a moment ago, since my senses are not instantaneous – to become an element constitutive of me. Thus she becomes partially and objectively immanent in me. The more *sympatique* I am, the more vivid, and accurate, will be my impression of her enjoyment, making her – her experience – more fully immanent in me.

In general, the extent to which the experience of one person, A, enters into that of a new subject, B, depends both upon how *sympatique* B is to A and how compatible A is to B. Thus the belief that God's self-expressive activity was supremely present in the person and the decisions of the historical Jesus implies the belief that Jesus was supremely *sympatique* to God, and that God is supremely compatible to Jesus.

We are for the moment still concerned with the ministry of Jesus: we turn shortly to his resurrection. It may be that during Jesus' ministry his disciples did *not* fully or consciously think of him as divine, as Son or Servant of God, as Son of Man, or as Messiah: it may also be that Jesus did not explicitly see himself in any of these terms. Indeed there are a small number of very significant passages in the New Testament which depict Jesus as completely

human up to his death, at or after which God raised him to super-human dignity: 'descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power . . . by his resurrection from the dead'.<sup>13</sup>

I shall suggest that the resurrection-faith may have begun as the *God-given* awareness, both individual and corporate, that in some intensely significant sense Jesus was still alive and present with his disciples. I shall emphasize this awareness as God-given, not self-generated: but in our present experience God works in and through our thoughts and aspirations – inspiring new ideas, certainly, but building these upon the foundations of previous ideas, not out of a vacuum. It therefore seems more probable, to say the least, that the disciples' later insights arose out of their *earlier* feeling – perhaps at the time only half-formed and largely subconscious – that in being with Jesus they were in some extremely special sense in the very presence of God's love and power.

The belief that 'in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself' belongs to mythology: however significant they may be, sin and reconciliation are mythological terms. The four opening words perhaps should not be separated from the rest of Paul's sentence, but if they are so separated the phrase 'God was in Christ', still more 'God was in the historical Jesus', is *not* a mythological statement: it corresponds to what I earlier called ontological reality. The further statement that Jesus' disciples were at least dimly aware of that reality *during his ministry* belongs, as I have just suggested, to history – as does the fact that Jesus was fully human.

Christian theology has always sought to affirm these three statements: process philosophy offers a framework within which they can be affirmed without either impairing their true status or resorting to paradox. God's indwelling in Jesus is the chief exemplification of this philosophy's principle of immanence: as Jesus intensified his obedience to the call of God so, without impairing Jesus' humanity and human freedom, God was supremely, yet objectively, immanent in Jesus. Thus the two 'natures' of Jesus Christ are affirmed, whilst Jesus remains – as logic insists – the one subject of his own decisions: Jesus the subject, yet God objectively present in such high degree that Jesus' decisions and actions supremely reveal, through the self of the historical Jesus, the 'Self-Expressive Activity of God'.

What has just been said may be regarded as true, but inadequate: inadequate firstly in failing sufficiently to affirm the *priority*

<sup>13</sup> Romans 1.3, 4 (RSV).

of God's will and act in the whole event Jesus Christ, and secondly in failing to maintain the *uniqueness* of Jesus. These may well be two ways of saying the same thing, but it is convenient to consider them separately.

The divine priority in the Incarnation is symbolized both by the Annunciation, God's messenger announcing his plan in advance, and by the virgin birth – more precisely, the virginal conception – of Jesus; also by the concept of the pre-existence of Christ, whether as *Logos* or Son of Man.

Even if he regards all of these as mythological, the Christian will find deep value in them and will wish to affirm them just as far as he can: the limiting factor is that nothing must impair our accompanying belief in the manhood of Jesus. One aspect of the Annunciation narrative is significant here: it depicts God's messenger, and therefore God's purpose, waiting upon Mary's consent: 'Be it unto me according to thy word'. God's will indeed has priority, but seeks to elicit Mary's consent rather than override her human freedom.<sup>14</sup>

A facet not yet mentioned of Whitehead's philosophy of process makes the same point. If each bud of experience *is* a growing together of its constituent elements, its own subjectivity arising with the process and not the precursor of it, then the process needs an initial aim or purpose, which must be *given* to it. Whitehead sees God as giving this 'initial aim'. Thus we are free in each moment of experience either to conform to that initial aim or – within the limits of our freedom – to diverge from it. Once again, God's will has priority, but seeks to elicit our co-operation.

If one follows Whitehead in extrapolating from human experience, one can find in this interpretation of the divine priority a doctrine of creation that is compatible with biological evolution: in the concept of God supplying a 'lure' to evolution, 'process' thinking approximates to that of Teilhard de Chardin.

But we are here concerned to apply this concept of the priority of God's will and purpose, which however waits upon – and may be thwarted by – human free will, to the whole event Jesus Christ, including its Old Testament background. I do not claim that God determined the course of that event in every detail: God did not foreordain the worship of the golden calf. But I do see the divine priority, God's prevenient guidance, in the event as a whole – the history of Old Testament Israel, the birth, ministry, death and resur-

<sup>14</sup> I owe this insight to Dr Norman Pittenger.



rection of Jesus, and the coming into being of his church – and in its effect, which we variously describe as the supreme revelation of God's love, the redemption of the world, the coming into being of the church.<sup>15</sup> Indeed it is precisely God's prevenient guidance that makes of this entire historical sequence, including its climax in Jesus, one single event, producing one single effect. I here quote from John Knox:

'The event was a whole event and its effect was a whole effect. We cannot break the event into parts and attribute the whole effect to one part, nor can we ascribe any particular part of the effect to any particular part of the event. Both event and effect are one and indivisible and . . . belong indissolubly together.'<sup>16</sup>

We now turn to the charge of having failed to maintain the uniqueness of Jesus. Those who feel strong *religious* reasons for affirming this uniqueness may not appreciate that there are others, and other Christians, for whom claims to uniqueness are an inevitable barrier to relevance. Proclaimed as the chief exemplification of the potentiality of human life lived in utter obedience to God, the life and resurrection of Jesus could become meaningful for some who find them utterly irrelevant when proclaimed as unique acts of God.

Thus there are also strong *religious* reasons for not exaggerating the difference between Jesus and the rest of mankind: this is best avoided by not isolating Jesus from his historical context. I prefer to avoid the word 'unique', with its several shades of meaning, but if it is to be used I wish to affirm the uniqueness of the whole event Jesus Christ, the whole Judaeo-Christian 'salvation-history', as the supreme revelation and enactment of God's redeeming love: a unique event, with a unique effect. (To affirm this is not to deny that God also both acts and reveals himself in other ways and in other religions.) Within this whole unique event the life, death and resurrection of Jesus occupy a uniquely central, indeed pivotal, position. In his historical context Jesus is thus doubly 'unique'.

Claims for the uniqueness of Jesus often take two forms not covered by the above. God's presence and indwelling in Jesus is said to differ not only in degree but in kind from his indwelling in the greatest of his saints, or in us. I can find no way of accepting this

<sup>15</sup> The coming into being of the church can be regarded either as the effect or as part of the event. See John Knox, *The Church and the Reality of Christ*, pp. 71, 121-129.

<sup>16</sup> *The Death of Christ*, p. 159.

claim that does not impair, indeed deny, Jesus' manhood. If religion has any meaning, a man's conscious and unconscious relationship with God is a vital aspect of his *self*. If this aspect differed in kind in the case of Jesus from every other member of the species man, then *in the present state of our knowledge* it would seem impossible rightly to describe Jesus as a man.<sup>17</sup> It may be the case that most Christians (and most Christian theologians) in most centuries *have* accepted this claim: but most have not shared either our modern sensitivity to the difference between history and mythology or our concern for the principles of logic. I emphasize the phrase 'in the present state of our knowledge', because it may well be that in the future new insights will enable us to affirm this claim: we should never assume that what now seems impossible will always be so. But at this present time I cannot affirm a difference in kind between Jesus and other men; indeed I find important religious reasons for wishing to deny this.

The christology of this lecture may also be attacked on the ground that it sees every constituent of the event Jesus Christ as *contingent*: Jesus' obedience to God is a contingent concept, whereas it may be claimed that God's redemption of the world in Christ is not contingent but foreordained. My reply is as before: if Jesus' obedience was not contingent, it was not human obedience. I would add that I see no need for this claim. That Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo is a contingent fact, and also true. Where religious truth is found enacted within history it cannot avoid contingency, and loses nothing thereby. As we now consider Jesus' resurrection, I would just add that there is contingency in the disciples' response to this.

As has often been pointed out, the resurrection narratives in the gospels – like the infancy narratives – have the characteristics of myth, while the tradition in Luke and John that the first resurrection appearances were in Jerusalem cannot satisfactorily be combined with the Galilee tradition of Mark and Matthew. Furthermore, neither tradition agrees at all readily with Paul's list of appearances in I Corinthians 15. Neither there nor elsewhere does Paul refer to the empty tomb, and his emphatic 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God' certainly suggests that when Paul wrote First Corinthians he did not know of the empty tomb tradition. In any case the main emphasis in the New Testament as a whole, and even

<sup>17</sup> This 'difference in kind' is also expressed by saying that Jesus is 'sinless' or 'perfect' man. Sin and sinlessness are mythological terms. I agree with John Knox that 'a perfect historical event is a contradiction in terms'.

in Matthew and Luke, is not on the empty tomb but on the *appearances* of the risen Lord, again present with his disciples and continuing to instruct them. This ties in with a point made near the beginning of this lecture – the extent to which the early church identified the risen Lord with the historical Jesus.

It seems that the earliest preaching of the resurrection made no attempt to describe the appearances, but rather proclaimed the *fact* of the resurrection as God's reversal of the disgrace of crucifixion: 'the death of Jesus is interpreted as Israel's No to the proclamation of Jesus and the resurrection as God's Yes, his validation of Jesus' message'.<sup>18</sup> This No-Yes pattern is found in the Marcan passion predictions, whose detailed form is almost certainly editorial; in Philippians 2, where Paul may be quoting a very early Christian hymn; and in Peter's speeches or sermons in Acts. Whilst these speeches are presumably Lukan compositions, many scholars believe that they include traces of the earliest Easter proclamation, preserved because they were remembered as being apostolic, and in spite of their 'adoptionist' tone: that God has raised his *pais* (child) Jesus; that God has *made* him both Lord and Christ.

Thus Paul begins I Corinthians 15 with a list of resurrection appearances, each limited to the bare verb 'he appeared to'. By this repetition Paul places his own resurrection experience on a par with that of the original disciples. Neither his own brief references nor the more detailed, but secondary, accounts of Paul's conversion in Acts suggests a publicly visible appearance of the risen Christ. Thus the quest of the historical Easter, in the sense of the *initial* nature of the disciples' Easter faith, suggests that this began with the conviction 'that Jesus was somehow alive among them and that, if this was so, God had indeed acted and had raised him and exalted him'.<sup>19</sup>

All this would seem to imply that – I quote from Professor Lampe's recent essay<sup>20</sup> – 'the Easter appearances were not dissimilar in kind from other phenomena in the history of religious experience'. However, as Dr Lampe says in the same paragraph, 'this does not imply that these men were not confronted with the Lord's presence as an external reality'. It is precisely this *external reality* of the Lord's presence which I wish to affirm for the first disciples, for Paul, and for ourselves.

<sup>18</sup> R. H. Fuller, *The New Testament in Current Study*, London 1963, p. 152.

<sup>19</sup> Robert M. Grant, *The Early Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 43.

<sup>20</sup> In G. W. H. Lampe and D. M. MacKinnon, *The Resurrection*, p. 27-60.

Professor Lampe draws a parallel between the disciples' Easter experience and Isaiah's vision in the Temple. There is, however, a crucial difference. Isaiah was confronted by, and in his vision 'saw' *God*. But the Christian experience of the risen Lord is of being confronted by an external reality that is both of God (and not simply from God), yet also *distinct* from God the Father: as he cries 'my Lord and my God', the Christian feels – as all the New Testament writers emphasize – that the living presence which confronts him is that of *Jesus*. This distinctively Christian experience differs from Isaiah's vision of God; from Mary's vision of Gabriel the messenger from God; and from that other Christian experience of being confronted by St Mary or one of the saints.

If one accepts that the disciples were confronted by the Lord's presence as an external reality, the question remains whether the risen Jesus was – and is – encountered as an individual distinct from God, and is therefore to be thought of as living on with his own subjectivity. The resurrection narratives in the gospels clearly imply *encounter* with Jesus, who both 'speaks' to the disciples – perhaps through visionary experience – and also responds to their response to him. The same is probably implied in I Corinthians 15. But whilst every chapter of the epistles is suffused and inspired by the resurrection-faith, few others – if any – use actual encounter-language. I cannot avoid the conclusion that by the time they were written – and the Pauline epistles are the earliest of the New Testament writings – Christians no longer thought in that way of their present experience of the risen Jesus; but reserved such language for the initial Easter period (extended by Paul to include his own formative experience). Indeed the ascension narratives imply such a distinction between initial and subsequent resurrection-experience.

I cannot survey Christians' experience of the risen Christ down the centuries, nor discuss its relationship to their other beliefs. In our own day, many Christians do indeed speak of their awareness of the living presence of Jesus in terms that imply encounter; but it by no means follows that, if asked to choose their words carefully, they would describe their experience of the risen Jesus as more like an encounter with another human being than like our encounter in prayer with God. Both I myself and most Christians of my own limited acquaintance would, I think, choose the second as being the closer parallel. Consider, for example, the difference between entering the Lady Chapel of a church to kneel for ten minutes in

prayer before the reserved sacrament, and calling at a friend's house for a ten-minute conversation. There are a number of Christians for whom the former is often the deeper and more vivid experience. But many of these would regard their experience in the Lady Chapel as a vivid form of *prayer*, in which they may have prayed to Jesus, but about which they would *not* employ the encounter-language that we use to describe a conversation, and which Luke used of the walk to Emmaus. They would, I suggest, be content to describe their experience as one of being 'confronted with the Lord's presence as an external reality', a reality distinct from, yet part of, the reality of God.

Process philosophy offers a framework within which one can affirm precisely this. It sees experience as consisting of discrete 'buds', each of which enjoys its own subjectivity during its brief growing together into a unity; it then perishes as a subject, 'living on' *only* in so far as its influence is felt by other moments of experience which make it ingredient – 'objectively immanent' – in themselves.

God is the chief exemplification of both aspects of this principle of immanence. We have so far considered only one aspect in this connexion: that the more we open ourselves to God and intensify our obedience to his call, the more God becomes objectively immanent in us, and supremely so in Jesus. But God also 'prehends' or grasps at us – at everything – in each moment of our experience. The more our thoughts and actions are compatible with God's loving will and purpose, the more fully he will incorporate them as objectively immanent in one aspect of his nature.<sup>21</sup> We earlier emphasized the divine priority in the whole event Jesus Christ: we also thought of Jesus intensifying his obedience to the call of God in each situation that confronted him. These alike suggest that the thoughts, actions, and experiences comprising Jesus' life and person will have been supremely compatible with God's loving purpose, with which ours are only sometimes compatible; and that they will have been supremely incorporated by God into himself.

We can now attempt to interpret both the similarity and the difference between Isaiah's vision in the temple and the Christian's awareness of his risen Lord. Both experience the external reality

<sup>21</sup> It is a fundamental tenet of this philosophy that God's nature has two inseparable aspects distinguishable only for purposes of thought: an absolute or 'primordial' aspect, absolutely unchanging and unaffected by the world: and a related or 'consequent' aspect, which is affected by the world. (See the great final chapter of Whitehead's *Process and Reality* or, for a brief summary, my article on Whitehead in *Theology*, April 1965.)

of God,<sup>22</sup> but in this experience the Christian also meets with the risen Christ, the total action of the life and ministry and death of Jesus, which has been raised or 'prehended' into the Godhead, into that external reality which confronts us in prayer and sacrament and accompanies and sustains us throughout our lives. Process philosophy envisages God 'prehending' aspects of everything – more precisely, of everything not utterly alien to his will – and making these ingredient in himself. But it is God in relationship to us and our cultural heritage of whom we are made aware in religious experience. God 'prehends' aspects of everything into himself, but our awareness lacks his universality: it has often been remarked that it is usually Roman Catholics who have visions of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Similarly, both now and in the initial Easter period, it is those within the community of his followers, and perhaps some on its fringes, who experience the presence of Christ. And just as those who had known and accompanied Jesus identified the risen Lord with their master and friend, so we – less confidently, perhaps – identify the risen Christ whose presence we experience with the Jesus whom we meet through the gospels. And if modern criticism enables us to get a little way behind the Christ of the New Testament proclamation towards the historical Jesus, then the identification we make will the more nearly resemble that made by the first disciples.

What has been said may be criticized as failing to maintain the uniqueness of the resurrection of Christ; this can be answered in much the same way as the parallel criticism in relation to the person of Christ. But two further criticisms of this interpretation of the Resurrection did not apply in the earlier case. It may be said that to speak of Jesus' thoughts, actions, and individual experiences being raised into God is not the same as to speak of *Jesus* being so raised. But 'nothing is more personal about a man than his concrete experiences':<sup>23</sup> inasmuch as Jesus lived a life of 'perfect' or 'supreme' obedience to God, so his experiences will have been wholly or supremely raised into the Godhead.<sup>24</sup>

This leads into the deeper criticism that in this interpretation

<sup>22</sup> I here assume without discussion the meaningfulness of 'the external reality of God'. We are concerned with the *christological* implications of the New Testament witness to the Resurrection, and of our own sense of Christ's presence. That *God* is experienced as external reality is, to my mind, both the *theological* implication of this and also its presupposition.

<sup>23</sup> C. Hartshorne and W. L. Reese, *Philosophers Speak of God*, p. 285.

<sup>24</sup> See the footnote to page 167, above.

the risen Christ is not *alive*, whereas the coming into being of the Easter faith was earlier described as 'the disciples' experience that Jesus was somehow alive among them'. In one sense this criticism is indeed valid, for in this interpretation of his resurrection it is not Jesus but *God* who is the subject, God having raised the concrete experiences of Jesus into 'objective immortality' in himself. These 'live', objectively, in God analogously to the manner in which my wife's joys and sorrows 'live', objectively, in me. But, of course, my wife also lives subjectively. And the critic may well ask whether what I have said does or does not affirm that the risen Jesus also lives subjectively. This requires a careful answer.

The interpretation I have proposed sees the resurrection of Jesus as the supreme instance, the 'chief exemplification', of its general concept of resurrection as 'objective immortality'. In these terms, the proposition that Jesus lives on subjectively is the supreme instance of some more general proposition as to individual survival after death: to reach a decision as to this supreme instance one would first have to investigate the general concept of resurrection, which lies beyond our present task.<sup>25</sup> It must here suffice to answer that these proposals neither affirm nor deny the doctrine that both Jesus and the 'souls of the righteous' live on subjectively. Indeed I commend them for your consideration largely because they offer a meaningful interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus, and of ourselves, *which does not depend upon that doctrine*.

By contrast, Paul makes the resurrection of Christ *dependent* upon a general concept of resurrection: 'For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised.'<sup>26</sup> Clearly, some members of the Corinthian church had rejected the Pharisaic doctrine of resurrection (or its Greek equivalent) – a doctrine that was accepted by Jesus, by Paul, and by the evangelists. Whilst this doctrine often forms perhaps the most cherished item of belief, I believe that there are many today, both inside and outside the churches, who follow the Corinthians in rejecting any such doctrine. In my own ministry I have talked with a number of thoughtful people – mainly young people – who accept belief in God as giving meaning and joy and hope to *this* life but reject, or are at best highly doubtful about, any concept of personal resurrection or immortality. Similarly, when using the Psalter, I am frequently struck by the note of *joy* and *hope* in psalms that rank high among the greatest religious poetry ever

<sup>25</sup> See my *The Living God and the Modern World*, pp. 108-141.

<sup>26</sup> I Cor. 15.16. (See also v. 13, and the chapter as a whole.)

written, although their authors – in common with most of the Old Testament – quite clearly did not believe in any concept of individual resurrection.

This matter is far too important to be judged by comparing numbers for or against – whether of ancients or of moderns. But our modern, indeed very recent, understanding of the psycho-somatic unity comprising a person, and of the deep influence of environmental factors upon personality, raises in acute form the question whether our present personality *can* be raised individually and clothed upon with a resurrection-body in a resurrection-environment. I ask myself whether it may not be *this* concept, and not the ‘death’ of God, that God himself is gently but firmly leading us to think out afresh. All I can do here is to suggest that there is a place today for a general concept of resurrection that sees permanent meaning and value in our lives without *depending upon* belief in individual life after death.

But my proposals as regards resurrection are neither wholly nor mainly negative. This interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus rests upon a general concept of resurrection as ‘objective immortality’ that I believe to be no mere metaphor. The aspect of process philosophy to which I have most particularly drawn your attention is its concept of immanence, whereby it affirms an *actual* sense in which one entity is immanent in another; a sense in which the experiences of one individual ‘live on’ in those of another, the subjectivity of these experiences passing from the former to the latter. We applied this to the case of God’s indwelling in – God ‘living in’ – Jesus, seeing this as the supreme instance, the ‘chief exemplification’, of his universal indwelling in his creatures. Process philosophy affirms that there is a *mutual* relationship between God and the world in that each affects, and is affected by, the other: its concept of immanence applies, therefore, to our indwelling in God as well as to God’s indwelling in us; thus it is as meaningful to speak of Jesus raised into God and ‘living on’ in God as it is to speak of God ‘prehended’ into and indwelling in – ‘living’ in – Jesus. The first is the supreme instance of resurrection, the second the supreme instance of incarnation.

The difference between the two is that the living God becomes incarnate afresh in each moment of the life of Jesus (or of ourselves), whereas the experiences of Jesus ‘prehended’ by God into himself – Jesus’ resurrection and ascension – form a finite sequence that terminated on Calvary. This sequence lives on in God, continually



re-created afresh in God's living memory and re-presented to Christ's followers as they turn to God in prayer and sacrament. But it is the sequence as a whole that is re-presented; no new subjective experiences are added – or if they are, that is another story. That is why *this interpretation* of Jesus' resurrection cannot take literally the encounter-language of the gospel narratives, but stands much closer to the epistles, and to much of our own experience of our risen Lord.

By way of illustration I take two key verses from Luke's beautiful narrative of the walk to Emmaus: 'And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.' 'Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.'<sup>27</sup> These symbolize two ways in which we are especially conscious of the presence of the risen Christ. As we seek prayerfully to interpret the gospels, either publicly or alone, we feel his living presence, objectively immortal in God and revealed to us as we search the scriptures. Some of us have this experience more vividly when we meet together for the breaking of the bread, as in our moving and memorable evening communion just now. As we turned in prayer to God, as we focussed our thoughts upon that Last Supper which so perfectly sums up Jesus' life of love and his obedience into death, as we remembered and re-presented his words and actions, so we sensed his presence with us – not the presence of another subject wholly distinct from God and from ourselves, but rather the living presence of his words and actions and the love that they convey; the risen and ascended Lord Jesus, objectively immortal in God, and revealed to us, in and through the whole action of the Eucharist, as of God and in God, yet also distinct from God.

The detailed framework of Whitehead's philosophy is far less known than his aphorisms, for example: 'Christianity has always been a religion seeking a metaphysic'<sup>28</sup> – with the implication that it never rests in any one metaphysic, or philosophy. Whilst our understanding of Christ can be deepened through insights of process philosophy, christology can never rest in this philosophy, any more than in that accepted by the early Fathers. In summing up, therefore, I would remind you of those parts of this lecture which do *not* rest upon process philosophy. The primary raw material of

<sup>27</sup> Luke 24.27, 35.

<sup>28</sup> *Religion in the Making*, p. 50.

christology is the New Testament documents. To study these I used the methods of form criticism. To interpret the results of that study I relied first upon logic. Hartshorne's criticism of paradox, and Whitehead's insistence that God is not an exception to all metaphysical principles but their 'chief exemplification', are products of logical thought that in no way depend upon process philosophy: indeed the converse is the case, for this philosophy is largely built upon such principles of logic.

It is logic, not process philosophy, which insists that one cannot both describe Jesus as a man and also say that God's indwelling in him differs in kind from his indwelling in other men: since a study of the raw material confirms the first statement, logic demands a modification of the second. The further insight I then derive from process philosophy is that of seeing God's indwelling in Jesus as the supreme instance, the chief exemplification, of God's indwelling in his creatures – a divine indwelling which is itself the chief exemplification of this philosophy's concept of immanence. This insight closely corresponds to the disciples' experience – perhaps fully explicit only after the Resurrection – that when they were with Jesus they were in some special sense in the presence of God. I suggested a like correspondence between the original Easter faith and the insight that the resurrection of Jesus is the chief exemplification of God's raising into himself of everything compatible with his loving purpose – an insight that is itself compatible with our experience of the risen Jesus as of God, and in God, yet also distinct from God.

## INTEGRITY IN THOUGHT AND LIFE

*Edward Carpenter*

'THE MODERN Churchman' bears on its cover a significant quotation from Erasmus: 'By identifying the new learning with heresy you make orthodoxy synonymous with ignorance.' This is well said. Certainly, it expresses in a cryptic phrase not only the renaissance-catholic-humanism out of which it was born, but also the regulative ideal to which members of the Modern Churchmen's Union, with varying degrees of success and subject to inevitable limitations, have sought to be true since the inception of their movement in 1898.

Undoubtedly a great deal of water has flowed under innumerable bridges since those spacious days, so much so that the begetters of MCU could not in their wildest moments have foreseen even in outline the shape of things to come. The fact is that patterns of thought as well as social and political structures have since then undergone almost cataclysmic change. On the negative side, two shattering world wars, conducted with scientific savagery, have broken the Utopian dreams which earlier fired the imagination of Victorian man. More positively, there has been a vast accession of new knowledge, which has resulted from, and in reverse led to, an increasing preoccupation with scientific method as a means of entering into an assured practical, if uncertain theoretical, knowledge. The result is our modern technological age with its annihilation of distance, its conurbation, and exploration of inter-stellar space.

No faith, certainly no incarnational, world affirming, historical faith such as Christianity undoubtedly is, can be indifferent or fail to respond to such environmental and conditioning pressures. Indeed Christianity has helped in generating them. Nor, of course, can *Modern Churchmen* do other than take account of this new *Sitz im Leben*.

It is against this background that we recall the early *alumni* of MCU, both those who were in it on the ground floor and those who followed in the decade after the first world war – Hastings Rashdall,

Sir Thomas Dyke Acland, Inge, Charles, Major, Raven, Matthews, to mention but a few. All were men of a wide and liberal culture; most of them preserved a basic optimism in spite of the appalling mortality of the 'war to end war'. Though each of them had his own particular field of excellence, they were not specialists in the concentrated way that we should now understand this description. Hastings Rashdall, for example, might well have held a chair in theology as in history, philosophy, or ethics. Inge by no means confined himself to researches into neo-Platonic mysticism but wrote on social problems, if not always with information and after the necessary homework, yet usually with interest and insight. Charles Raven was an experimental botanist of distinction. All these modern churchmen knew how to express themselves in clear and incisive English prose.

The effect of such generality was to provoke the asking of general questions, of a kind which the ordinary person puts to himself even if in a less sophisticated way – that is questions as to the over-all meaning of human existence, and how Christian faith fitted into the overall scheme of things. In this respect these theologians would uniformly have described themselves as theists, emphasizing equally transcendence and immanence, though the *rationale* of their theism might vary according to the degree of their reaction against idealism of the Bradleian vintage. For the most part they were averse to the isolation of religious categories and the treating of them apart from the whole experience of man. They believed that there was a natural religion; and that Christianity constituted a coherent system and as such could be made intelligible to reasonable men, who are themselves in duty bound to give a 'reason for the hope that is in them'.

Such a general approach inevitably led to an emphasis on ethical commitment; to maintaining the comprehensive character of the Church of England; to championing the rights of laymen; and to opposing any form of ecclesiastical introversion. In particular there was a concern that freedom of thought and the prosecution of biblical studies should not be shackled by the chains of doctrinal orthodoxy.

It was this spirit which dominated the working out of the theme 'Christ and the Creeds' at the Conference in Girton in 1921. The controversy and the acrimony which followed this 'get-together' are now largely forgotten except among older members of the Union. Its great achievement, however, was to prompt the setting up of the Archbishops' Doctrinal Commission, the report of which, published

in 1938, was a remarkable document and may one day be seen as marking a great landmark in the continuing life of the Church of England.

To read today the papers delivered at the Girton conference is to be reassured that its members were asking the right questions and that they entertained the proper priorities. This conviction is not lessened by the fact that they brought to this debate an inadequate awareness both of the range of Christian experience across the centuries, and the subtlety and depth of the biblical testimony. Thus it must be allowed that the quest for the historical Jesus was indeed a more complex task than the lecturers supposed, since the New Testament material, which alone can provide it, is in its earliest stage of discoverable evolution already fact *plus* interpretation – what we now call ‘event’. Here T. R. Glover cannot be allowed to have the last word. On the other hand, in believing that historicity mattered – I exempt Inge from this observation – these Modern Churchmen were right. To assert that their theological thought was too sharply, if unconsciously, conditioned by the prejudices of the middle-class society to which they belonged, is merely to affirm that they were the children of their own age as is equally the case with Bonhoeffer and Tillich. Surely contemporary theology bears painful witness to the agonizing and sometimes graceless history of Germany during the last half century! Then again, if these Modern Churchmen show an almost excessive reliance on the reason, this is perhaps better than its opposite which resorts far too early and easily to the escapism of paradox and ‘the tension of opposites’.

But our position in the ‘sixties is not theirs in the ‘twenties and early ‘thirties, and in contemplating the difference doubtless there is a double lesson to be learnt from the secession from the Modernist ranks of Hoskyns and Lightfoot. The lesson is that the *assured* results of biblical scholarship – I underline assured as distinct from merely speculative results – must be taken fully into account while at the same time they are integrated into a Christian affirmation which does not fight shy of asking cosmological and philosophical questions, or is in too narrow a sense biblical. I suspect that at the end of the day a Barthian theology of the Word can lead to irrationality; Bultmann’s demythologizing, in the extreme form that he states it, to the reduction of Christianity to a gnosis; van Buren’s ‘contagion’ into a rootless intuitionism. Let it be added, however, that to say of these men that they have a great deal to teach us – I am

not so sure about the last – is an impertinent understatement.

So it seems to me that the task of MCU, in the latter half of the twentieth century, is not to be ashamed of the liberalism which it has inherited from its distinguished predecessors, but positively to introduce this liberality into interpreting the scholarship and meeting the felt needs of the 'sixties. This must mean setting one's face against the contemporary flight from reason, and against the cult of the absurd. MCU must go on asking the questions which it has asked from the beginning, since they are the right questions, and arise willy-nilly out of man's predicament. 'What are we and why are we? Of what scene the actors and spectators?' If the 'giants' of a former generation seem to us a little over-confident, it was not through any lack of humility but because philosophy then had not passed through the astringent discipline and necessary purgation of linguistic analysis; nor had biblical criticism penetrated to its present depth. MCU must do today what its leaders did yesterday, that is, take into its system the best of modern thought in many and diverse fields, yet without the fanaticism or partiality which just will not 'see life steadily and see it whole'. So quickened and invigorated it must face up to the questions which people existentially ask as they live their lives as persons. It must see Christianity within this context.

For this task, integrity in thinking and in life is a *sine qua non*, and it is to this theme that I now turn.

## I

My subject – Integrity in Thought and Life – is, as you will have noticed, as ill-defined in its scope as it is generally inclusive. It would allow me, though let me assure you I will do my best to resist the temptation, to talk about almost anything. The real problem will be to avoid the trite and the commonplace, for no one disputes that we ought to be people of integrity. Nor, may I add, do I intend to indulge in a learned etymological discourse on what precisely 'integrity' means. Words, as Thomas Hobbes wrote, 'are the wise man's counters – he does but reckon by them; but they are the money of fools'. Words are living things: they derive their meaning from their use; they are what they are intended to convey. In this respect their sense cannot easily be stated propositionally, for they carry along with them subtle undertones which defy exact analysis. Moreover, words are sometimes uniquely evocative within the society where they are employed, and can even become personal to the man

who utters them. I shall take it, however, that no matter how difficult it may be to define, we all know generally and in practice what we mean when we talk of a man of integrity, or of a man who is unfortunately without it.

What is important, however, and it ought to be said at the outset, is that if a man is to act with full integrity, he must have within himself the possibility of becoming a fully integrated person. Self-authentication demands full self-realization. To admit the possibility that this can be brought about suggests a great deal as to what it means to be a person. It suggests, for example, that there must be in every man a centre in depth, which co-ordinates and gives effective direction and harmony to his life history. In Hume's world of successive states of consciousness with no underlying reality to which they belong and of which they are the expression – in such a world, there can be, in my judgement, no integrity, no self-authentication. True, in practice and all too often, there can *seem* to be no core to the personality; no real centre; no continuing stay, with the result that, as in Plato's famous analogy of the charioteer and the horses, the self moves irregularly and its unpredictable course represents a kind of waywardness and slavery – succession but no development. But the use of such terms as unpredictability, waywardness, slavery, these suppose some underlying ground to the *psyche*. Full integrity means transparency; that every action, every inclination, every thought is the necessary expression of the essential person; that there is no blockage; no chaotic disturbance which clouds and distorts. The real person is equally in everything he thinks and does, at different levels.

For this reason any discussion of integrity, if it is to be pushed far enough, must end in some ontological enquiry as to the nature of the universe in which such integrity can potentially exist. I say this, recognizing how much such an enquiry may seem at variance with modern climates of thought. Such an enquiry would have to discuss whether there is a universe capable of supporting and sustaining any final unity in man. I cannot but ask myself whether the greatest preacher of self-authentication whose own integrity often puts us to shame – I refer to Sartre – does not weaken the basis on which alone such self-authentication can be founded. The same seems to me to be true of Bertrand Russell, who can find no real status for the self in any clearly articulated philosophy of being. So far as logic goes, he maintains, the person – that is the ultimate *me* – does not exist. 'The self cannot enter into any part of our knowledge', he

writes. People whom we know and friends whom we love are 'imaginary hooks' – the words are his own – on which we hang various sense impressions which come to us from and through them. A. J. Ayer arrives, in general, at the same conclusions. The self, he tells us, cannot be discovered, and by discovered he means found empirically, as we might find an object in space. It is no more than a logical construct inferred from the data of sense impressions.

I do not myself accept these shattering and nihilistic conclusions. But what surely is certain is that if there is no continuing, or underlying self, such as can ultimately not so much give unity to experience but be the ground of that unity, there can be no integrity in persons. There is nothing to be integrated, unless integration can be equated with a sequence of non-causally connected states of consciousness, whose only inter-relatedness is succession in time. Similarly, it would seem to me doubtful whether there can be integrity if there is no universe; no order which stands over against us; which demands our respect, and which constrains, provokes, elicits and maintains whatever integrity there is in us.

I shall not, however, continue this discussion today, important though it is, because my concern in this paper is with something different. I call attention to it only to admit frankly my own assumption that there can be integrity because there are persons who can be integrated, and a *universe* in which they can be held together.

Let me turn from such detached reflections to state dogmatically: he would indeed be a cynic who was not prepared to allow that some people have preferred death to the sacrifice of what *they* regarded as the preservation of their own integrity. Such men are not only the seed of the Church; they are its flower. They belong to humanity as a whole and they give dignity and added lustre to what it means to be a person. No discussion of integrity, no matter at what level, can be entered into unless it is finally placed within this *quasi-transcendental* context. We are treading upon holy ground. What for some has been in the main a subject for nice theoretical discussion, what some have wantonly betrayed, has for others been a matter of life and death. It is just a fact of history that a few have prized their integrity so highly and guarded it so zealously that for no temporal reward were they prepared to forfeit it. In saying this let us, of course, frankly recognize that human motivation is much more complex than it was some time ago thought to be; and that the martyr's crown may bear within it something of human pride and obsessive obstinacy. The early church, as we know, was forced



positively to discourage the seeking of martyrdom. There were indeed masochists before psychiatrists gave a name to them. But when all allowance has been made, it remains the case that saintly and intelligent men have preserved integrity only at the supreme cost; and that the sacrifice was entered into calmly and with knowledge. They regarded such preservation as worthwhile and felt themselves to have no option. A case in point is Sir Thomas More. Never did man preserve integrity with greater self-awareness and calm detachment; and in this company of great men, who would deny a place to Dietrich Bonhoeffer?

The reason why I have begun by placing integrity within the context of martyrdom is that it serves to bring out, in clearer relief, something which will underlie, though not necessarily I hope become obtrusive in, all that I subsequently say. It is that integrity, that is, to be true to what it demands, comes to us as a constraint; as something which requires in us fidelity. The words of Luther have continued to ring down the centuries as a clarion call, quite independently of whether we could, with integrity, stand precisely where he stood. The significant fact is that he found a point of no return. In a world of so much seeming relativity he witnessed to an absolute. 'Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God.' 'You may take me,' he is saying, 'break me, kill me, but so long as I remain myself and direct my own life from within, I just cannot betray what I believe has been given to me as a sacred trust.' As we know, Luther was not done to death, but it was around this primary insight, the respect for an individual constraint, that the Reformation took fire. Such faithfulness is at the heart of any truly religious response – a sense of sanctity, of a loyalty that cannot be violated, an absolute demand even if many a man has interpreted this simply as a demand to be true to himself. In the martyr, and this includes many a true philosopher – one can hardly forbear thinking of Socrates – this devotion is kindled into a blaze and illumines the darkness into which, all too often, we quench our own light.

A moment ago, you may have noticed that I employed the word 'true' adjectivally to 'philosopher'. Such a peripheral use may serve to remind us that we cannot talk of integrity for long, without the concept of truth entering in. The man of integrity seeks 'truth' and endeavours to be true to it when found. To be faithless here, either in lacking the perseverance to quest for it, or having found it to betray it, is to indulge that lie in the soul which is the death of the spirit. Such treason can be many-sided, for a man may violate truth

in many ways. He may, for example, refuse to be true to himself, that is, to be authentic in his personal relations, as when he parades a false image and conceals the real man. He may be so sluggish, so sensual, so gross, that he cares little for truth and its claims. They do not tug at him. He may, through fear, refuse to face up to reality as it is, to facts as they are, and take as his working hypothesis, 'where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise'. Withdrawing from the complexities and the involvement of living, he may seek to protect and immunize himself against the blasts of the real world: even his religion becomes the expression of this withering escapism. For life as it is, he sustains himself with the vision of a cosy protection and seeks a shoulder to weep on. Instead of subduing the earth and building a kingdom, he awaits his pie in the sky by and by.

So the supreme treason of truth's betrayal, which is the denial in a man of his own integrity, can affect the whole sphere of human living, whether it be in a work of art, an act of worship, a philosophical argument, or an encounter in love. Of all these we can say they do not 'ring true'.

## II

It is to the constraint of truth that I wish now to call attention – and to do this within a contemporary setting. The limitation thus involved is important. All of us now recognize, willy nilly, that the world is being increasingly dominated by the scientific method, progressively applied to ever enlarging areas of human life. Most of us know something of the implication of this method – its empirical basis, its controlled experiment, its check against error, its practical dependability, its refusal to make absolute claims. Most of us also know or suspect that it is a method which is not necessarily applicable to all areas of human experience, and that it is unwise to rule out as incapable of constituting a real knowledge that which cannot be tested by its criteria. We know also that the scientific method demands some kind of faith commitment if only to there being some kind of uniformity somewhere or (even more minimal) that the quest after it is worthwhile in the intrinsic satisfaction or pleasure that goes along with its prosecution. Yet most of us have a hunch that if our scientific knowledge of the universe were complete, and its findings reduced to a unified, inclusive system of predictable or rationally guaranteed uniformities – even then there would still remain areas of human experience outside it. My concern, however, is not with

any philosophical analysis of the scientific method but to stress its profound effect at the popular level on the psyche of man. To say this is, of course, a commonplace. Everyone is saying it; but its apparent banality may well serve to conceal the real significance of the conditioning effect which this method has upon all of us. In brief, what its empiricism in this field has done is to give us what seems for practical purposes – I underline what seems – an assured knowledge without resort to ambitious philosophical speculations. It provides a practical dependability. If you ask in scientific terms (or mood) ‘Is it true?’ there is usually a recognized way of answering the question, if only tentatively. And by and large the truth, or what happens to be the case, demonstrated in this way commands fairly universal assent. Its ‘proof’ is public and not private, and is open to anyone sufficiently knowledgeable to understand what it is all about. It claims to be true independent of the individuality, the idiosyncrasies of the investigator. Science deals with universals; it asks a question; and seeks the answer by controlled and repeated experiments; by checking against the possibility of error. So long as the ‘model’ interprets the experienced facts and makes prediction possible it will maintain itself; as more facts come to light, the ‘model’ may cease to be adequate as an explanation; it will then have to be modified as Newton gave way to Einstein.

Forgive me if I seem to be emphasizing the obvious. What I am leading up to saying is that to most people in the ‘sixties of the twentieth century, the approach to the question ‘Is it true?’ is: can it be shown to be true? can it be empirically validated? What does not fall within the yardstick of this assessment *may* be true, and indeed significantly important to us as persons, but it cannot be *shown* to be true. It is a matter of opinion; a kind of Sheol, a shadowy world of half knowledge waiting to be established only when empirical evidence for it becomes available. Till then it only knocks at the door in the forecourt of the temple of knowledge. The priest within is too well instructed to be caught on the hop.

Let me repeat. I am *not* engaging in any deep philosophical analysis as to the nature of the scientific method: I am simply concerned with its psychological effects upon most people, and upon all people some of the time. It has brought to birth a mood, a temper which is ambiguous.

One aspect of this mood – and this is important – is the engendering of a respect for truth as necessarily imposed upon and constraining us. The scientist cannot for ever get away with it. The facts will

eventually catch up on him. Certainly he may wish certain conclusions to be true and succeed for a short time in so framing his questions, so conducting his experiments and selecting his materials, as to convince himself that they are. This has happened, so Sir Alister Hardy suggests, in his fascinating Gifford Lectures, in respect of the study of acquired characteristics during the nineteenth century. But the scientist cannot go on doing this all the time. 'Something', however we may understand that reality, stands over against him; and this 'something' finally passes judgement. The physical universe just will not co-operate by behaving according to the scientist's whims and fancies. It remains indifferent to his theories and finally he must bend the latter to conform with the former. If he refuses, then he's had it. In this limited respect, that is within his particular discipline, integrity is forced upon him. He will not get very far without it; and this applies to the scientist qua scientist whether he is a Christian or a Marxist, a Jew or a Buddhist, a good man or a bad man. Here all are in the same boat; what they affirm about the physical universe must submit itself to the same validation, must face up to the same yardstick – and the validating yardstick is practical and public.

The kind of integrity of which I am speaking, imposed upon the scientist as the condition of success in his investigations, is not, I recognize, the same as an integrity for him as a whole person, though it may well be part of it. It is conceivable, I suppose, that a good scientist might be a very bad man and in some respects a bogus person. But it remains the case that within the specialized department of his own skill he must be humble, follow whither the argument leads, bow down before the facts, and make his judgements accordingly. No matter how 'given', coming from who knows where, is the 'blik', the hunch, the intuition, the *je ne sais quoi*, call it what you will, which prompts the original question, the scientist must work out its implication, test it, prove its truth or falsity the hard way. In doing this he will know that people all the time are looking over his shoulder, eager to pounce upon him and to show him the error of his ways if he puts a foot wrong.

Now the effects of all this upon that enigmatic man, the man in the street – you and me – that is, upon our collective psychology, is to bring to birth at a particular level a deep respect for the truth, for what happens to be the case. Only the truth works. 'Give me the facts' – so cries the modern man. 'Is it true?' he asks, and by implication he will assume that if it is true, it can be demonstrated to be true. Integrity means not trying to twist it; not putting over a fast

one; being, as people say, objective – a much mis-used word if John MacMurray is to be trusted, as I think he usually is. All of which leads me to say that it is within this climate of opinion that religious claims will today be tested.

There is, however, another aspect of the scientific method to which I have already referred and to which I must briefly return – I mean the tendency in response to this preoccupation with a method, to demand that a real knowledge should be limited to what this method can show to be the case. Doubtless the man in the street thinks that all areas of knowledge will finally be brought within its safe sanctions and that when this happens they will constitute a truly unified system. In taking this stand he is not usually conscious that this attitude needs some justification: that it cannot be taken for granted; particularly since these other areas of experience are often those which are felt to be most significant. The fact that this stand is taken, however, only makes it more important to affirm, and this is fundamental to my paper, that in these other territories of human experience where our assertions are non-empirical, non-formal, we must adopt the same standard of integrity and respect for the truth as is imposed upon the scientist by the very nature of his methodology. To be faithful to such integrity in this field undoubtedly demands tremendous self-discipline and restraint. Let us be frank; it is possible to get away with almost anything in the pulpit in a way which would be laughed out of court at a meeting of the British Association. Hence the temptation to be slipshod, to excuse ourselves from careful preparation before we speak, to mistake waffle for wisdom, platitudes for profundity. How easy it sometimes is to answer questions in the sermon which would confound us on the platform.

I believe that among the many things that we can learn from the scientific method is the over-riding need for scrupulous honesty in all areas of human knowledge, and a frank avowal of ignorance when we simply do not know. I must confess, and I here accuse myself as much as anyone else, that we are all far too cavalier, too easily accommodating where professions of final faith are concerned. Lest I am shot down, however, for holding opinions that I do not entertain, let me say that I am perfectly conscious that religious, including liturgical statements, cannot be expressed in the same language as, for example, can statements in physics or formal logic. The former necessitated a greater resort to symbolism, to allegory, to a manner of expression which is as rich in poetic suggestion as in emotional

depth. No one in his senses imagines that a liturgy, or indeed credal affirmations, can conform to the precision of mathematics or the abstractions of physics. Far from it: but this does not mean that the demand for integrity is any less in the one than in the other. It is paramount in both; but often harder to achieve in the former than in the latter – harder because the scientist can usually check his empirical observations against error, and if he doesn't someone else will. Independent of a disinterested pursuit of truth, he is helped to keep on the straight and narrow. The theologian in the study, the preacher in the pulpit, at least in the short term, has no such corrective. He *can* get away with it, and many of us do.

It is here that I would ask, perhaps monotonously, whether we *are* sufficiently scrupulous; whether in our liturgy, in our credal statements, we *do* show this respect for simple integrity. Are we not all too often, and in so many departments, driven to say: 'Well, of course, we do say "X", but though nine-hundred-and-ninety-nine people out of every thousand would understand when we say "X" that we mean "X", it isn't really quite as simple as this.' Let me repeat for fear of misunderstanding: I agree that we cannot convert credal, liturgical statements into mathematical formulae; and also that in a continuing community certain words acquire particular historic meanings within the group and therefore ought not lightly to be discarded. All this I accept, but the real question is: is the symbol or metaphor we are using either too obscure to be capable of mediating what we really wish it to say or too free with truth for us to wish to affirm it? I fear I should have to maintain that far too many religious statements go on being made, though those who make them do not believe them to be true; or if they do so believe, they do not regard them as true in the meaning that they naturally carry. Is this really compatible with that basic integrity which alone is fitting in the most sacred area of our human interest and concern; with that passion for the truth as we see it; that scrupulous regard for others in their apprehension of it, which *ought* to be the distinctive feature and regulative ideal of *any* religious profession. If we do not stand firmly on the truth, is there anywhere else that we can hope to remain upright?

Let me illustrate. 'I believe in the resurrection of the body', we recite Sunday by Sunday. Under pressure, of course, we talk about 'sax' and 'soma', the continuation of the full personality, identity and what have you: but is such symbolism, 'the resurrection of the body', the best way of affirming what we wish truly to maintain?

Does it convey the latter to ordinary people; and is the kind of intellectualization which alone can make it reasonably respectable – is this appropriate in a solemn profession of belief uttered within an act of worship? Not very important, we may say, and mumble something about tradition, symbolism, and the difficulty of finding any alternative form of words. But I don't believe that we can lightly dismiss this, and similar matters, in too complacent a way.

Again, is it compatible with the full integrity of a religious response to invite godparents solemnly to promise that their godchildren will 'believe all the articles of the Christian Faith'? And if such a promise is in its nature as absurd as it is quite impossible to fulfil, whatever right have we to go on demanding it of people at the very point where their integrity ought to be at a maximum? Would a scientist, in his laboratory, I wonder, be quite so casual, so unperceptive, so indifferent to truth? I suppose that most people are persuaded to take such promises because they see them as part of a customary ritual without contemporary relevance.

But I must forbear to weary you further with itematic examples of this rather niggling kind. I must confess, however, at the risk of seeming somewhat precious, maybe pedestrian, that I do not see these as trivial or unimportant. One more illustration I am constrained to give – the 39 Articles to which David Edwards drew attention in the *Church Times* and the Bishop of Birmingham in his Modern Churchman's Conference Sermon for 1966. Here again, I am well aware of the arguments that this is an old, historic, reformation profession of faith, much more liberal than others of the same period; that the revised assent is not to any article in particular but to their general tenor; and then only that they are agreeable to the word of God. Also that as nobody really means anything when he affirms them, they constitute a great bulwark of liberty and freedom of conscience.

I am, I repeat, very conscious of all this special pleading and perhaps, on occasions, I have said the same kind of thing myself. But such arguments are really quite contemptible, and in themselves utterly unworthy of serious discussion. They would depreciate any coinage, and in particular devalue and debase men whose calling is dedication to him who in St John's Gospel affirms 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life'. Ought not clergy, in their respect for truth and plain speaking, to be *more scrupulous* and not less than others; must not their standard be as absolute as they can contrive to make it? 'If gold rust, what must iron do?' Is there, I ask, any justification

for requiring *any* person either to read such Articles publicly, let alone give assent to them, before taking up his cure? If truth is the pearl of great price; and integrity the condition of our ever hoping to arrive within a mile of it, can this disciplined quest be helped by such sophisticated casuistry? If a man can honestly profess this document, let him; though I would wish that he could not in conscience do it. But to *require* it represents a lack of sensitivity, an absence of seriousness which is as frightening as reprehensible; and this, mark you, at a time when we are hoping out of our contemporary debate to be led to a fuller realization of the truth that is in Jesus; and when we are all being taught caution not to claim too much.

I ask, therefore, quite simply, have not lay people a right to expect integrity in their clergy, and can assent to the Articles serve in any way as a good introduction to their finding it? Let us have our fun and games and our make believe; but are they very relevant in a matter of final belief and ultimate concern? I cannot think that they are. At a time when many sincere and humane people outside (and within) the Church feel hesitant to say anything about ultimate reality and the mystery which informs it, dare we affirm so much – much of which, at least in some of its aspects, is morally revolting?

### III

Integrity in discerning the truth and remaining faithful to it when found – this also demands integrity in our personal relations, in our encounters with each other. To treat another man with full respect means, in another context, a willingness to expose ourselves to him as we really are. Here a great deal of new light has been shed on the complexities of human motivation, indeed on personal relationships generally, through the pragmatic approach of modern psychology. We know now, that the man suffering from a sense of inferiority, the person, for example, who has himself been starved of love and understanding, is the potentially dangerous man. He will endeavour to compensate for his own 'lack' in one of two ways. He may aggress against others by using them as instruments to his own supposed well-being. He may blitz them into submission, and ride roughshod over them. Or, in reverse, he may seek to use them by ingratiation; by becoming sycophantic, converting himself into a door-mat and thereby inviting personal annihilation in a desperate desire to please. The will to power and the will to submission are



often obverse and reverse of the same coin, springing from a primary condition of insecurity, of fear, of malaise. St Paul reminds us, with desperate urgency, how even good works can represent a parent unrest, expressing itself in a neurotic attempt to seize the Kingdom of God by violence. Thus the 'other' becomes not a brother beloved but a means, in and through whom, by doing him good, we win salvation and discover fulfilment. What ought to be free, mature relations between equals, the finding of ourselves within the relationship of finding him, the unique encounter, that is, of unique persons, degenerates into a parody of itself. St Paul found at the cost of great suffering that integrity in human relations does not come this way; we cannot achieve this end by projecting our own frustration on to others. How many an inhibited parent does just this at the expense of his children?

I have no time to do more than refer to the contemporary need to 'Christianize' the more impersonal relations into which in our modern technological, urban society we must necessarily enter. These encounters cannot, in the nature of the case, be fully exposed, fully personal, fully authentic in the way that I have tried to describe above. They cannot conform to Martin Buber's 'I-Thou', yet on the other hand they ought not to be swallowed up and submerged within the nexus of mechanical manipulation. The problem here is to see that they are so contrived as to be instrumental to the more full realization of the personal. If they are not relations of deep personal encounter, costly often in psychical and spiritual stress and strain, yet they must never cease to be relations of mutual respect. They have their own kind of integrity. For a fuller investigation of this tremendously important aspect of modern life, I refer you to Harvey Cox's *The Secular City*. His reminder that we must not look back nostalgically to village relations of the past but seize hold of the opportunity of the present is wholly salutary.

What we must accept in all such discussion is that, for a Christian, the search for personal integrity is part of his search for the truth.

Authentic personal relations are supremely important; indeed they are a major part of what Christian Faith, with its emphasis on creation, incarnation, and redemption, is about. Just because of this, however, the depressing fact of *corruptio optimi pessima* is ever with us. It is, alas, all too often the case that religion can lead to the making of relations which are non-authentic, not least because the passion which it can engender all too easily lends itself to treating men as means and not ends. People exist for us to save them.

Certain forms of evangelical zeal illustrate this unhappy perversion: as does the ever present temptation to root personal prejudice, indeed the crude will to power, in the ontology of theological structures. This is not to say that faith ought not to be communicated and shared: it *is* to say, however, that we must preserve integrity as we do so, our own and others. Persecution has bedevilled the history of Christendom for centuries, whether it be expressed in crude physical violence, or in more subtle psychological pressures. One cannot but wonder as to how far this aggression, this blitzing, does not derive much of its force and power from the unsettlement, sometimes the rebuke, which most of us feel when confronted with beliefs other than our own. When the aggressor is in himself psychologically insecure this coercion may take on a sadistic form. The priest, let us frankly admit it, often without any conscious awareness, is in constant danger of compromising that integrity which makes for mature human relations. He finds himself more at home in the master-disciple encounter; and sometimes his very zeal to propagate is an expression of doubts which he dare not face up to. To act as the midwife and assist growth into effective selfhood demands restraint and a high measure of maturity. Nor is the temptation to convert our own prejudices into divine decrees always easy to resist, particularly if we do not feel ourselves to be very successful in the general art of living. I often wonder, for example, how far the theological arguments put forward to oppose the admission of women into the ministry are not better understood simply as rationalizations of a male anxiety to preserve privilege. The fact would seem to be that every profession has resisted such an invasion: but after a vain if protracted struggle has at last been forced to give way to this relentless army, this monstrous regiment of women. Even that hallowed and numinous institution, the Jockey Club, has at last given its imprimatur to a feminine trainer. God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform. But none of these other professions was able to root its exclusiveness in absolute theological truths – in an ontology. Christians, however, have achieved this remarkable feat.

What we must accept is that in communicating a faith, built on the absolute integrity of the person, it is paramount to encourage responsibility, honesty, right and worthy motivation. It is not the correct external action that matters but rather the right disposition of the heart, and a common entry into the full and abundant life – into the apprehension and grasping of the truth. This can only

come from an informed recognition of the truth for what it is and its unique claims upon us. Thus I have, myself, little sympathy with that kind of persuasion into faith which endeavours to corner a man; as we say to fix him; to cut off all avenues of escape. The means of faith's communication cannot be divorced from the nature of the faith which is communicated. Faggots cannot set us on fire with the love of God.

Such reflections as these, general in character though they are, strike me as relevant to the new dialogue into which we in the west will increasingly enter with the great faiths of the east, now resurgent and anxious to share their treasures with us. How shall we meet and encounter them? As fellow-seekers anxious to learn from each other, or will the desire to dominate obtrude itself, the more so because of our own contemporary doubts and unsettlements. The fear of syncretism is understandable and often justified; but it can serve to mask, and make respectable, an exclusiveness which lacks humility, which draws back from a real authentic encounter. Let us make no mistake; if there is to be a fruitful coming together there must be integrity; integrity on both sides and on all fronts. If we see, as we may do with justice, the withdrawal and non-involvement of eastern religions as leading to acquiescence in social squalor and to breeding a resistance to change, then equally we must see Christian activism as degenerating into the violence and blood-bath of war and the horror of persecution. The uniqueness of our incarnational faith does not demand that we assume self-sufficiency or that we cannot enrich ourselves from others; nor that our truth cannot be enlarged by what the Most High in his wisdom has taught more widely.

May it not be within such a broad context as I have tried fitfully to suggest in this paper, that MCU humbly, charitably, and reasonably can introduce a distinctive contribution? We, you and I, believe in following whither the argument leads: we believe in treating people with a full respect: we accept that divine treasures are mediated through earthen vessels: we entertain no illusions of infallibility. We are grateful for the past into which we have entered, and do not regret that our lot has been cast in the not unfruitful field of the Church of England. Yet at the same time, *dei gratia*, we are determined to leap over the wall. The pastures outside are teeming with life. We want to get mixed up in them.

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